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MINCE COLLOP CLOSE



# MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

BY  
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*“ But let us ask ourselves what life in one room can be, taken at its best. Return to those men, women and children whose house is one apartment, and consider whether, since the world began, man or angel ever had such a task set before them as this—the creation of the elements of a home, or the conduct of family life within four bare walls. You mistresses of houses, with bedrooms and parlours, dining-rooms and drawing-rooms, kitchens and washing-houses, pantries and sculleries, how could you put one room to the uses of all? You mothers, with your cooks and housemaids, your nurses and general servants, how would you in your own persons act all those parts in one room, where, too, you must eat and sleep and find your lying-in room and make your sick-bed? You fathers, with your billiard-rooms, your libraries and parlours, your dinner-parties, your evening hours undisturbed by washing-days, your children brought to you when they can amuse you, and far removed when they become troublesome, how long would you continue to be that pattern husband which you are—in one room? You children, with your nurseries and nurses, your toys*

*and your picture-books, your space to play in without being trodden upon, your children's parties and your daily airings, your prattle which does not disturb your sick mamma, your special table spread with a special meal, your seclusion from contact with the dead and the still worse familiarity with the living, where would you find your innocence, and how would you preserve the dew and freshness of your infancy—in one room? You grown-up sons, with all the resources of your fathers for indoor amusement, with your cricket fields and football club and skating-pond, with your own bedroom, with space which makes self-restraint easy and decency natural, how could you wash and dress, and sleep and eat, and spend your leisure hours in a house of—one room? You grown-up daughters, with your bedrooms and your bathrooms, your piano and your drawing-room, your little brothers and sisters to toy with when you have a mind to and send out of the way when you cannot be troubled, your every want supplied without snoring in menial household work, your society regulated, and no rude rabble of lodgers to sully the purity of your surroundings, how could you live and preserve “the white flower of a blameless life”—in one room?*

*“But is that all I can say? I might throw down*

*that statement before you, and ask you to imagine yourselves, with all your appetites and passions, your bodily necessities and functions, your feelings of modesty, your sense of propriety, your births, your sicknesses, your deaths, your children — in short, your lives in the whole round of their relationships with the seen and the unseen, suddenly shrivelled and shrunk into such conditions of space. I might ask you, I do ask you, to consider and honestly confess what would be the result to you. But I would fain do more. Generalities are so feeble. Yet how can I speak to you decently of details? Where can I find language in which to clothe the facts of these poor people's lives and yet be tolerable?"*

The late JAMES BURN RUSSELL,

MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH OF GLASGOW.

Quoted in *The Report of the Royal Commission  
in Scotland.*





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*FOR ELLIE*

## CHAPTER I

### QUEEN OF THE FAN-TANS

#### i

THE morning boat-train from Princes Pier was crowded, and Mr Struan Ure Gordon, returning from the Convention of the League of Social Service held at Rothesay over the week-end, was exceedingly cramped in his corner of a third-class carriage. For all his charitable instincts, he was hating the fat woman beside him, whose warm legs pressed so crassly against his, and the working-man opposite, who pushed his paper from him at frequent intervals to spit lavishly on the floor. His elbows were pinned, so that he could not turn the pages of his *Glasgow Herald*. He feared for the security of the fat-woman's hamper on the narrow rack above his head. A spectacled lad at the other end of the compartment was plainly, even aggressively, suffering from hay fever. Humanity in the flesh, Mr Gordon admitted to himself ruefully, did not seem so well worth while helping as when viewed from the gentle platforms of the Social Service

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League. He should not, he concluded more charitably, have been in such a hurry to get back to Glasgow by the first boat from the Coast on a Monday morning.

But though the compartment was already overcrowded, the worst was still to happen. The station bell had rung, and Mr Gordon waited for the tiresome journey to begin, so that it would be over and done with all the sooner. But then the door opened, and an excited woman of middle age hurled a ragged infant across the long legs of Mr Struan Ure Gordon; then another; then another; then another; and then another. The door banged shut. Above the yelling of the pile of youngsters on the floor of the compartment the middle-aged woman's voice was heard in breathless and bitter criticism of the methods of the Glasgow and South Western Railway. . . . The skirl of the guard's whistle blotted out her protest; a shriek from the engine proclaimed the absolute tyranny of Time; and the train started.

The confusion among the legs of the seated travellers lasted until the engine had rushed with a shriek into the first of the tunnels that burrow under the slopes on which the town of Greenock hangs, grey and smoky, over the Firth of Clyde.

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Then a girl rose from between the thin shanks of Mr Struan Ure Gordon, cuffed one of her companions, and pushed another from where he sat on the legs of a whimpering, toothless, emaciated brat of five.

“Staun’ you at the windey, Francie Pringle,” she commanded. “Let wee Isa up, ye big keelie, and gi’e her back thae chuckies ‘to play wi’. Mary”—this to a slack-mouthed girl who was paying for her parents’ follies in the currency of congenital idiocy—“sit doon on the floor and keep quiet, like a good wee girl.” She backed herself against a window and held wee Isa protectively against her slim body, concluding: “If I get ony lip from ony of youse, I’ll hit ye a clout on the jaw.”

Mr Struan Ure Gordon, recovering from the shock to the innate conservatism that somehow lived at peace with the reforming radicalism within him, lowered his paper to watch and appreciate. That a slum girl should possess the gift of authority did not surprise him: that she should be obeyed implicitly by other children of the slums was much more impressive. Mr Gordon was an amateur of charity. He had done his share of heavy, hopeless work in the slums of Glasgow, and he knew the awful shiftlessness of

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the poor. The character in this waif—returning, he guessed, from a Fresh Air Fortnight at Dunoon—interested him. He forgot his own discomforts.

Even her looks were distinctive. She possessed a shock of bronze-coloured hair; her eyes were grey, clear and confident. A snub nose stood for the fierce independence of her type, the high cheek-bones for a complete imperviousness to sentimentality. The pure Scots peasant type physically, sharpened intellectually by three generations' experience of the city, Mr Struan Ure Gordon decided. It pleased him exceedingly that the race in her was not complicated by the blood of Irish, Lithuanian, Italian, or German-Jewish elements, from which he had so often recoiled in his contacts with the bastard underworld of Glasgow. He could have wished that she had come his way before he had delivered his Presidential Address to the League of Social Service.

He noted her name—Bella Macfadyen. A square-faced boy, her senior by at least three years, and half-a-head taller, fought noisily with her for a place at the window. He pushed her into Gordon's lap and pushed out his head to see

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the country sights, so strange to his guttersnipe's mind.

"See, Bella!" he cried: "See the coos! Luk at them—thae's coos."

Bella put a hand on his collar and dragged him back.

"Pit up that windey, Jimsy Campbell," she ordered acidly. "Can ye no' see the gentleman lookin' at ye?"

Up went the window reluctantly.

"Come away back oot o' there an' staun' quiet."

Jimsy came back and stood quiet. Bella handed him a bunch of jaded rhododendron blossoms.

"Haud thae rosidandruns for wee Isa, and don't let me see ye near that windey again."

It was as she commanded. Gratified by the thought for his own comfort, Mr Struan Ure Gordon brooded happily on the case of Bella Macfadyen. While the train clattered through the grey, flat suburbs of Glasgow, where he saw in a washing fluttering from the back window of a Plantation tenement-house a whole history of degradation, it was borne in upon him that here was one whq might be saved from the



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fierce hazards of the slums and given a chance. . . . It was the child who brought him back to actuality.

"Hey, mister," she was saying, "gie's a hand wi' thae chuckies."

She thrust upon him a blood-warm fistful of pebbles, then busied herself among her companions.

"Jimsy—gi'e wee Isa back thae rosidandruns. Francie Pringle, watch you an' no' fa' oot when the door opens. Mary—haud you on to me. There ye are, Isa, hame to dirty old Glesca! . . . Whit did I tell ye, Francie Pringle?"

She had them round her like a dependent brood when the middle-aged lady reappeared to marshal a procession. Before her Mr Struan Ure Gordon found himself bowing.

"That little lass. . . ." He pointed to Bella Macfadyen.

"Has she been annoying you?" asked the woman sharply.

"No! Oh no, no! She interests me. .I could do something for her. If you could give me her name and address."

The guardian of the Fresh Air Fortnighters stared at him.

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"Bella's a very difficult girl," she said slowly.

"Oh no, no! Not at all, I'm sure. Oh no, no, no!"

"She comes from the Cowcaddens, then," the lady admitted. "Mince Collop Close. You'll not like that."

"I thank you."

Mr Struan Ure Gordon bowed and walked off smartly. He passed a group of pale drabs in dark shawls, the mothers of the children, weary and weak from over-much child-bearing. He wondered which was Bella's mother. It would be so much better for his vague purpose if Bella had no mother; for he was himself a childless man, and was already thanking God for a vision and an opportunity.

At three o'clock that afternoon Inspector John Ogg of the Northern Division of the Glasgow City Police heartily shook hands with Mr Struan Ure Gordon, so well known in the Division as a doer of good works.

"Mince Collop Close! Goodness gracious me, Mr Gordon! It's as tough a corner as we have."

But Mr Gordon, his face alight with the glow of his genuine faith, was insistent.

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"All right, Mr Gordon, all right. It's your funeral. We'll get you there."

He pressed a bell, and a constable led Mr Struan 'Ure Gordon off through the drab streets of the Cowcaddens to Mince Collop Close. This warren of ticketed houses was entered through a low archway, which was pervaded by the stench of ammonia. Against the peeling walls lounged seven young men of lowering, unfriendly aspect, who spat as they passed, apparently in tacit criticism of Constable Macleod. They had to pick their way over a lively heap of filthy, vociferous children at the dark entry to the narrow wooden stairway, which led them, the gnarled treads protesting, to a landing on which half-a-dozen frail doors opened. On one of these the policeman knocked. A panel of the door was stealthily removed; through the black orifice peered a swollen face. Then the door was opened by a blowsy old woman, in filthy bodice and short-gown, whose pale eyes widened as she fully recognised in the gloom the character of her visitors.

"Christ Almighty! The cops!" she enunciated slowly.

It was with great difficulty she was persuaded

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that the intentions of her visitors were peaceful. Her huge form barred all entrance to the dark room that was her home. She was on the defensive. She did not mind admitting that Bella Macfadyen was her niece, but she did mind very much that a well-dressed stranger should want to see Bella. It was a painful business for Mr Struan Ure Gordon. He recoiled from the filthy opulence of Mrs Cassidy's person; he was at pains to keep his eyes off the lavish breasts that slopped beneath a soiled bodice over her waistband. But he persisted. He did make it clear that if he was a toff, he was a harmless toff. Mrs Cassidy began to reflect that there might, after all, be profit in listening to him. Finally she stood aside and nodded to him to pass into the chamber.

He had no eye for its details. He did not see the bed on the floor (for the accommodation of Mrs Cassidy and Bella, and an Irish labourer and his wife, their lodgers), the two chipped china dogs on the mantelpiece, nor the mess of wet tea-leaves and egg-shells in the sink below the little window. Even his apprehension of the stench of foul air and sweaty bodies faded before the satisfaction of seeing Bella Macfadyen, her sleeves rolled to her elbows, at work by the sink — the

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jaw-box, as they know it in the Cowcaddens. She recognised him at once. She dropped the rags she was rinsing, and spun round to confront the philanthropist, her grey eyes blazing.

"Here, you! Whaur's the chuckies ye pinched fra' wee Isa? Eh?"

Mr Struan Ure Gordon stepped back. He blushed. He stammered. But he was saved by an involuntary motion of his left hand, which drew the pebbles from his pocket.

"I'm awfully sorry. I forgot entirely. But I knew I would see you. . . ."

The generous smile of Bella Macfadyen was a grand reward. There was almost a lump in his throat when he saw the slack mouth of Mrs Cassidy collapse sideways in a smile. He knew the right impression was created. He proceeded to explain his case, flustered, but very anxious to be reasonable . . . very anxious. Bella liked him. He was a big Jessie, but . . . but she liked him.

Bella Macfadyen was not at all sure, however, that she would like to become the ward of Mr Struan Ure Gordon and go to school with the gentry. It was not in her to have any sentimental regard for Mrs Cassidy. She had a very exact

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knowledge of the extent and value of Mrs Cassidy's affection for her. But she was as suspicious of the gentry as only a slum child can be.

"I'm no' richt sure," she kept repeating. If she hadn't liked the tall, nervous man before her, she would have very rudely refused. But she did like him; and she didn't love Mrs Cassidy; and she didn't like the gentry in the abstract. "I'm no' richt sure."

This hesitation angered Mrs Cassidy. She had by now sized up Mr Struan Ure Gordon as a rich and foolish citizen. He would take that brat of her brother Alec's out of her way; and an aunt, deprived of a niece's help, was always due some compensation. She rounded on Bella.

"No' richt sure, are ye no'?" she queried acidly. "And who the blazes are you to shake yer heid, when the gentleman's ready to mak' a lady of ye?"

Mrs Cassidy's beetling eyebrows issued a challenge, a threat, to her niece; and Bella understood. If she did not accept, there would be trouble for her in Mince Collop Close. Not that she wasn't ready to fight, but Mrs Cassidy was the one person over whom she had little hope of gaining ascendancy; and to Bella Macfadyen

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personal ascendancy was a passionate necessity. What the gentleman was offering her had possibilities. She could always knock the jaw off the young 'toffs. And there would be good clothes and good food, and . . . and all sorts of possibilities of distinction which could not come her way in Mince Collop Close in a lifetime. The more she thought of it, the more her egotism was excited. Mrs Cassidy and Mr Struan Ure Gordon stood silent above her while she considered, the old woman breathing heavily, minatorily, the man shifting his weight from foot to foot and running his fingers through his hair.

"Can ye no' say Yes?" asked Mrs Cassidy at last.

"A' right," said Bella cheerfully.

### ii

Mr Struan Ure Gordon carried out his intention faithfully. Holding with grave fidelity to the belief that the poor should have all the opportunities he himself enjoyed, and having established a right of vicarious paternity over a child of the slums, he set out to endow her with the benefits which any child of his own body would have enjoyed.

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It was a splendid but a very grave mistake. Bella Macfadyen (of Mince Collop Close) in a seminary for young ladies in Pollokshields! Bella Macfadyen as a boarder with a decayed gentlewoman in Langside! It was an invocation of the furies of the social system.

Bella Macfadyen came to school at The Laurels full of earnest, pacific intentions, fully aware of her social deficiencies; and that first, mistaken humility gave confidence to the superior young ladies of the suburbs. They sniggered when Bella said "heid" instead of "head," when she used honest swear words where Pollokshields conventions indicated anæmic slang. They sniggered *at* her; and Heaven alone knows the bitterness of the struggle between nature and gratitude that went on in her bosom. Out of regard for her benefactor she repressed within her the natural pugnacity of her kind, and her careful forbearance only encouraged her tormentors. The baiting continued, grew more confident, more reckless, more bitter. She tried to contain herself, till, one day, they cornered her and jeered in a circle round her. The spirit of the Cowcaddens broke loose. Bella Macfadyen, swearing vividly, bled the nose of Miss Dorothy



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Maxwell, blackened the eye of Miss Sheila Turnbull, and kicked the posterior of Miss Daisy Carmichael Ritchie.

That was the first of a series of incidents. There were solemn and very proper interviews between the headmistress, Miss Auchencloss, and Bella; between Mr Struan Ure Gordon and Miss Auchencloss; between Bella and Mr Struan Ure Gordon. Within the school there was no communication between the young ladies and her they rejoiced to call "the keelie." For that Bella cared nothing. Indeed, it pleased her. She saw with intense satisfaction that their hatred was the product of fear, and for her the world was well lost if she could command that emotion in others. She saw, too, that the elaborate patience of Miss Auchencloss was founded on mistrust and timidity of her own incalculable ferocities. She enjoyed the armed neutrality while it lasted, and delighted in the worry brought into the life of Miss Auchencloss by the visits and threats of the fathers of the other children. So long as Mr Struan Ure Gordon was not harassed; for that weakling she had a strange, maternal tenderness. He understood. He never scolded, but just gazed at her with earnest, dazed eyes, his

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white fingers running through his long grey hair, saying: "Yes, yes, Bella. We are getting on nicely. Oh yes, yes. . . ."

Then he died in the middle of her fourth month at The Laurels.

He had left in his will instructions and financial provision for the future of Bella Macfadyen. But there could be no testamentary command of the affections of the young ladies at The Laurels or of those of their headmistress. The sniggering continued and intensified. For a time Bella checked her contemptuous anger, grateful even to the memory of Mr Struan Ure Gordon. So the sniggers gave place again to frank insult. For the sake of a memory Bella might have stood even that; but the memories only accentuated loneliness, and assertiveness was ever stronger in Bella Macfadyen than gratitude. In the end, after announcing her firm intention of knocking Miss Dorothy Maxwell's ruddy block off, she knocked out two of that young woman's front teeth. Half-an-hour later she told Miss Auchencloss to take herself and The Laurels to hell; and then set out, full of vigour and confidence, for the slum from which she had been so foolishly uprooted.

That confidence in herself was the only factor

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in the destiny of Bella Macfadyen provided by the help of Mr Struan Ure Gordon. Four months as a pariah had steeled her egotism; the persistent sniggering of those who feared her had only strengthened her inherent self-reliance. She who had been elected for training as an angel had got from that schooling the attributes of an Amazon.

But Mrs Cassidy was angry. With many obscene embellishments she demanded to know if her niece was daft.

"God alone knows," she said, "God alone knows what's in yer heid, ye wee besom! Ye could ha' got a' the fine clothes ye ever wanted, and been a real lady, an' had money to spend like wa'er—and ye go an' mak' a mess o't! I could break yer flakin' neck when I think o't."

"Juist you try," said Bella. "The polis'll be gey pleased to hear who pawns the stuff for Red Lafferty."

There could be no moving the girl. Mrs Cassidy launched at her niece a vicious cuff, which Bella easily dodged, and contented herself for the time being with a mouthful of curses.

So Bella came back to Mince Collop Close, firmly determined and well equipped to work

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out her destiny according to her own ideas. She had won self-confidence at The Laurels, and ridded herself entirely of respect or sentiment for others. With her aunt she lived on strictly material terms. In return for her keep she did what work the single-room house demanded — kept watch on the movements of the police, on occasion received (with all the innocence of girlhood) such officials as called to make awkward inquiries, and generally took part on a material understanding in the business, of which the reception of Red Lafferty's stuff was the foundation. She came to know too much to be disposed of. So clearly did she show her sense of the value of that knowledge, her right to personal freedom could not, ever so trivially, be abused. Mrs Cassidy learned to respect the intensity of single purpose behind those unfriendly grey eyes and the flush on the taut skin above the high cheek-bones. Even in her cups she dare not risk such a trivial familiarity as a caress with this Bella whose creed was the fiercest sort of realism.

Bella grew up, even in the stunting environment of Mince Collop Close. There was strong peasant blood behind her somewhere. The young men who gathered in the stinking archway came to

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realise that old Cassidy's wean was worth looking at. She grew tall, and her maturing body took shape, till the rhythm of deep breast and swelling hip and straight free limbs could draw remarks as she passed out and in. She had an ankle and a high-arched, disdainful foot, and it was her vanity to dress them well in fine stockings and buckled, high-heeled shoes. Her face—it was not pretty; it was thin, if anything, and hard; but it held the quality of disdain and fierce pride, for which the men of Mince Collop Close are ready to draw razors. And it was held so finely on a white neck that grew perfectly out of the firm bosom. Above it was a gorgeous banner of auburn hair, aflame with character. When it was not covered with the tartan shawl of her kind, the young men of Mince Collop Close were wont to utter, under their breaths, the name of their Saviour at the sight of it.

Proud she was, first of all, fiery, independent, strong. But inevitably she was called in time into intercourse with her fellows. Asceticism is not an attainable ideal in the slums. Bella Macfadyen's destiny, in any case, lay in dealing with her fellow-creatures, and she could see no triumph that was not over others. The domina-

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tion she must have must be over human will. So in adolescence she began to consort with those who, from the base provided by the archway of Mince Collop Close, preyed in an organised band on their fellow-citizens.

The hooligans of Glasgow were early discoverers of the principle that in warlike operations—and life in the slums is a series of warlike operations—union is strength. It is their habit to join together in gangs. At different periods there have been The Redskins, The Hi-Hi's, The San Toys and The Tit-Bits. In the young days of Bella Macfadyen the predominant gang in Cowcaddens was the Fan-Tans, recruited mainly from Mince Collop Close. Into that clan she was absorbed naturally. To escape absorption would have been difficult; to attempt to escape would have been to invite continual molestation or even assault of a peculiarly violent kind. Her nature demanded action, adventure, risk, excitement, and these, as a Fan-Tan, she could experience daily.

By the Fan-Tans she was taken for granted. Her looks alone qualified her in the eyes of the young men with the flat noses, and what their lords desired, the women had to accept. Beyond that, she was eligible in every other respect

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favoured by the Cowcaddens. As a step-dancer she excelled, an artist in the double-shuffle and the side-cut. She could deliver a song with that perfection of nasal intonation which the Cowcaddens has accepted from vaudeville as the stamp of the gifted vocalist. She could drink in the glittering bars better than any one of her sisters, as steadily and deeply almost as the men. The police she feared not at all: from bloodshed she was never known to recoil. She learned to steal from shop-doors and, more delicately, to abstract trifles from pockets. Her vocabulary of obscenity was rich; she had even a gift for inventing new and happy turns of phrase. Nerves, conscience, remorse were never near her. Her capacity for immobile cruelty impressed even a cruel people. And she had always that beautiful body.

She knew it: she knew it as her strongest weapon among the men—and that meant among the women as well. Before she had reached the age of sixteen many men had made attempts on her chastity. None had succeeded. Bella had no respect for virginity as a pious abstraction, but her body was her own, and therefore she had to keep it. The men of Mince Collop Close learned at length that the jugular of the rash

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admirer was in danger from the razor which Bella kept hidden in her bodice.

So, by that most natural of processes, her prestige among the Fan-Tans grew, until, when she was nineteen, the gang wondered if even Red Lafferty's woman could keep her place as their Queen.

Red Lafferty was indubitably King, by virtue of superior strength, superior will, more relentless cruelty, and quicker and keener brains than his fellows possessed. He was as ugly as sin—a squat brute with bulging, firm muscles, long arms and a battered, sinister, flat-nosed face. He talked little; he did much; he was feared. Indubitably King of the Fan-Tans. . . . So that she, whom he had chosen to be his woman, was Queen. Yet Nellie Ryan was hardly cut out for royal responsibility. She was fair and plump and of high colour, and her positive qualities were nothing more than a huge capacity for jealousy, a spiteful tongue for Red Lafferty's private ear, and a gift of shrill, petty and highly indecent invective. From the first she had hated Bella Macfadyen, and had tried her best to screen the brilliance of that rising star from the eyes of her man. But Red Lafferty's terribly logical sense of proportion was not to be affected. Under



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cover of his protection she could launch insult at her destined rival; it maddened her the more that Bella, biding her time, was not to be provoked to strife. She shrilled, she schemed, she challenged . . . and Bella kept on climbing the steps of the throne.

In time, a decisive battle became inevitable. Bella knew as much. She prepared for it with all the intense concentration of which she was capable. But there could be no physical contest. Nellie Ryan knew too well that in such a struggle with such an opponent she was bound to lose against youth and strength. She looked about her for less direct means of gratifying her vicious jealousy. Her opportunity came at length.

Red Lafferty, for ever restless, organised an affair. It concerned the exchequer of Noah Maurenstein, the Water Street bookie. According to an almost crudely simple plan, Red Lafferty was to visit the Jew, ostensibly on business relating to the Manchester November Handicap. At a suitable moment Mr Maurenstein was to be knocked silly by a blow on the head. The rest, to lift the bookmaker's ready cash, would be easy. But it would be by no means so easy to enter and leave the premises without attracting suspicion.

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The Northern Division of the Glasgow Police had for some months past displayed an embarrassing curiosity as to the nature of the business transacted between Mr Maurenstein and his numerous visitors. Policemen, as easily recognisable as such in plain clothes as in uniform, were numerous in Water Street just then. So Red Lafferty must have the assistance of such an accomplice as could be relied upon to distinguish between a policeman and a layman a hundred yards away, to warn him of danger, and, in extremities, to distract the attention of the police by any sort of desperate ruse. It was axiomatic among the Fan-Tans that the King must be the last sacrifice.

Red Lafferty would have taken the help of Nellie Ryan for granted. She was his woman, his official scapegoat. But Nellie Ryan, for once in her life, dared to refuse. It was easy for her to simulate an illness: it was just as easy (as she discovered with great bitterness) to suggest that Bella Macfadyen could do the work and to hear the suggestion applauded. Red Lafferty had been watching Bella; she was a ruddy fine Moll, he confided to his agonised woman. Bella got her orders that afternoon.

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A few minutes after noon next day she turned casually out of Dobbie's Loan, across the Port Dundas Road, into the grey tunnel of Water Street. A work-girl enjoying a day off, her appearance suggested. She wore her buckled shoes, with the broad laces tied in a showy bow, her thinnest stockings, a neat skirt of blue serge, and a shawl of dark Sutherland tartan. In her piled, flaming hair glistened a great yellow Spanish comb. She was humming a tawdry tune of the halls, sung by Miss Florrie Forde at the Pavilion the week before. The song reflected her mood. Turning the corner, she had seen Red Lafferty pass into the close where Noah Maurenstein had his office. Far up Dobbie's Loan she had seen big Macaulay, the policeman on duty, wandering unsuspiciously southwards. Only a handful of shrill, dirty children diversified the empty monotony of Water Street. It was to be an easy job. She walked slowly down the street, careful not to lift an eye to the window of Maurenstein's office, and into Ann Street. The window of a stationery shop, gorgeously filled with violent pages from the *Police Budget*, occupied her for a minute. Then, still magnificently casual, she turned back into Water Street. From the

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opposite end Constable Macaulay was walking smartly to meet her. She encountered him coolly.

"Ye're in a hurry the day, Mac," said Bella cheerfully.

"Just that," said the constable. "It's you I'm wanting."

Bella's brain jolted into activity. Somebody had clipped on them. Nellie Ryan had clipped. Bella saw it all very clearly. Wait till she got a hold of Nellie Ryan. . . . But she had still to deceive the policeman and save the sacred head of the King of the Fan-Tans.

"Whit d'ye want me for?" she asked pertly.

"Come you up to Maurenstein's and you'll see."

She knew that she was in for it. Red Lafferty was up there; so also, though probably in a state of insensibility, Noah Maurenstein. Please God, she breathed, Red had had the sense to lock the door! She could still bluff this Highland fool. She talked loudly so that her voice might echo up the well of the close to the straining ears of Red Lafferty.

"Whit d'ye think I'd want wi' old Mosey? I've mair to dae wi' ma money than pit it on the horses."

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Come on, you," commanded the policeman grimly.

They reached the dark landing on which the door of Mr Maurenstein's office opened. Bella's heart jumped at the sight of a square of pasteboard on the door. On that square was crudely printed the legend:

### BACK AT TWO

"There ye'are, Mac," said Bella cheerfully. "Old Mosey's awa' hame for his dinner."

The slow wits of Constable Macaulay hesitated before the rebuff.

"The woman said the two of you were up to some dirty work," he murmured doubtfully.

"She was a liar, then!" said Bella with blithe conviction.

On the other side of the door Red Lafferty, clutching a bundle of dirty notes and poised tensely astride the ugly body of Noah Maurenstein with its grinning, yellow face, noted again with a grim sort of joy that Bella Macfadyen was some ruddy Moll.

But Constable Macaulay had his share of the dourness of his race. He shook the door till the lock rattled. He butted it with his great shoulder till the panels cracked. •

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## QUEEN OF THE FAN-TANS

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"There's naebody in or they'd open," suggested Bella. "Juist you tak' a keek through the keyhole."

The policeman stooped and peeped into the murkiness of the office. He could see a portion of a table and Maurenstein's chair standing empty. He turned to Bella:

"Well, you'll come with me to his house, and if Maurenstein is not there, it's the nick for you, Bella Macfadyen."

Bella went gladly. The battle was won. Red Lafferty was safe. It would go badly for her if and when Macaulay should discover the bruised, stertorous body of the Jew huddled behind the door of his office. But she clung to the belief that the discovery was conditional. She now knew enough of Macaulay to scorn his stupidity. Anyhow, Red Lafferty could get away with it now. It was her affair to waste the policeman's time.

It took them ten minutes to reach Maurenstein's house in a St Rollox slum. Mr Maurenstein was not at home. The woman of his house could neither understand the language of the policeman nor rid her mind sufficiently of quivering Semitic alarm to make an attempt to do so. It took five

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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minutes to convince the policeman that Mr Maurenstein was out—on strictly lawful business, his sallow housekeeper was careful to explain. They turned back to Water Street.

“I’ll burst the door open,” he growled threateningly to Bella.

“Burst away!” retorted Bella cheerfully.

They did not reach the door. In Dobbie’s Loan they met the Jew, shuffling along close to the wall. There was a blue mark on the dirty yellow skin in front of his ear, and his eyes lacked the normal Hebraic lustre, but he was alive. The wretch shivered when the broad Highland body was placed across his path.

“Nodings!” he cried, then smiled biliously. “I done nodings.”

“Where were you the last hour?” said the policeman fiercely.

The Fan-Tans were saved from the law by the law’s majesty, of which Noah Maurenstein stood in pitiful terror.

“I bin at the docks,” protested Mr Maurenstein. “Yiss, at the docks. A leedle business . . .”

He wriggled under the arm of the dazed policeman and was free. Macaulay gazed upon Bella. She put out a rosy tongue at him.

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## QUEEN OF THE FAN-TANS

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"Ever had?" she demanded to know, and left him standing.

It was evening before she returned to Mince Collop Close. As soon as she was clear she had made her way northwards, put in an amusing hour in the exchange of candid badinage with lightermen on the Canal, refreshed herself with a bag of chips bought in a dirty shop in the Garscube Road, sniffed suspiciously at the hints of open country near Possilpark, and turned homewards when the gas lamps were being lighted—straight rows of etiolated flowers lining the long, sad streets.

Red Lafferty stepped out of the blackness of the archway to intercept her. She knew he had waited for her, but she took care to seem casual.

"Where's Nellie the nicht?" she asked.

Red Lafferty cursed.

"I swiped her ruddy jaw for her," he growled.

Then his hand gripped her forearm, and he peered at her with intense black eyes.

"By God!" he hissed: "You're the sort."

There was a tremendous implication in his tone.

### iii

A crown was hers for the taking.

Nellie Ryan had fallen, and the King of the



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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carefully, she returned to face Red Lafferty when that grim man had nursed his anger and lust to something near frenzy. They met on the dark landing, a yard from the door of his room, her potential prison-house. He gripped her arm.

"Whit's a' this?" he asked fiercely. "When are you comin'?"

She hesitated, feeling for a cue.

"Oh, Red, I'm no' richt sure . . . I want to think."

"Think be damned!" was his comment.

That Bella Macfadyen should ever be in doubt, either as to the simplicity of his suggestion or her own attitude to it, astonished him. Her playing of the game deceived his narrow mind completely.

"Juist a wee while . . ." she continued to falter. "I'm no' richt sure . . ."

And with these words she lighted the quick train of his egotism. The wee besom! Saying No to him, Red Lafferty! He screwed her arm and hissed at her.

"No' richt sure! By Gees, I'll make ye sure!"

He paused to give her arm another wrench. She clenched her teeth. Then he yelled his wrath at her.

"If it's onybody else, by God, I'll . . . I'll . . ."

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## QUEEN OF THE FAN-TANS

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She knew what he meant. It was the razor for that non-existent creature of his jealousy. Her mind worked quickly. . . . But he was done for the time being. With a last turn of the wrist, he sent her spinning against the wall and stalked into his room, the door slamming behind him. She leaned against the wall for a minute, panting, then turned into the house of her aunt.

She laid herself down to sleep, not unhappily. In her trouble she had suddenly hit upon an idea, presented freely by Red Lafferty. That terrible young man had made a mistake. He should have remembered the quality of her before whom he spilled his jealousy. "Onybody else . . ." Bella chuckled grimly. She had her foot on the steps of the throne.

It was never her way to hesitate. Next morning she dressed herself with care. Her most dazzling comb went into the lurid mass of her hair; she breathed heavily on her patent shoes, and rubbed them till they shone like mirrors. The opening of her blouse she pinned low, so that the warm hollow between her breasts should draw the eyes of men. Her right hand on a jaunty hip, framing the gracious fall of her tartan plaid,

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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she went out on to the streets in search of a martyr to her lust for power.

The fates chose Constable Macaulay. He was coming off duty, his oilskin cape over his arm, his vague Celtic mind brooding on things far away, when an elbow tipped his arm and a pert, fresh voice shredded the flimsy texture of his dream.

“Hullo, Mac!”

He spun round to be dazzled by the white teeth and the shining hair.

“Oh . . . it’s you, is it? It’s your braws you have on the day!”

“Aye. I thocht, ye see, I might be meetin’ you!”

It was the man’s misfortune that her badinage suited his yearning mood, filled a want in his misty soul. He straddled his legs and with a gallant flourish threw his coat over a massive shoulder. He tipped his helmet back to help banish the chilling atmosphere of officialdom. His clumsy wits rallied to the aid of his Highland egotism in the vivacious contest of the sexes. And Bella played to him carefully. He was clay in her deft, remorseless fingers. He was hers to toy with until she chose to let him go.

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## QUEEN OF THE FAN-TANS

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A swift look up and down the street now and again allowed her to judge the moment nicely. When a certain rugged form should appear round the corner from Dobbie's Loan she would offer to walk a bit of the way with the policeman—towards it. What if it was like handing the fool to his death? She cared not at all. The fixity and whipcord strength of her purpose would have driven her to sacrifice a nursery. She watched the corner, a leopard ready to spring. . . .

At last he came swinging round, his hands in his pockets, his bull head sunk between his shoulders. The policeman recognised him at once.

"Here's your friend, Red Lafferty," he said jocularly.

"No friend of mine's," said Bella swiftly. "Come on, I'm no' wantin' to speak to him."

And Macaulay was led towards the bully. Red Lafferty saw them come. The black blood of him rushed to his head; his outraged vanity came near to choking him. His heavy brows came down over his eyes. He quickened his pace. At Bella he shot one quick, cruel glance of warning, then one of contempt at Macaulay, and passed on. •

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"He iss a dour one, that," said the policeman.

At which innocent and perfectly just remark Bella threw back her beautiful head and laughed, shrilly, deliberately, so that Red Lafferty must hear. Then, round the corner in Dobbie's Loan, she turned and ran from her victim.

Another turn, and she was into a narrow, quiet lane, one of a shabby maze through which she made her way to Mince Collop Close. There, under the archway, as she had calculated, Red Lafferty was waiting for her, his terrible eyebrows making one black, threatening line over his flat criminal nose. He stepped in front of her and gripped her shoulder hard.

"Oh, ye're back!" he sneered.

"That's my business," said Bella, her cool grey eyes challenging his.

"We'll see, by God!" said Red Lafferty.

"It's that Hielan' pig, Macaulay, is it?"

"Whit if it is? Let go. . . ."

She wriggled neatly from his grasp and dodged beneath his arm. Passing on proudly to her aunt's lodging, she did not deign to look back on him whose absolute power had been flouted for the first time.

But she was very careful-not to move beyond

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## QUEEN OF THE FAN-TANS

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the door of the house till the peach-coloured lights blinked and sputtered in the streets of the city and the glare went up to illuminate the low, heavy rain-clouds that had come up from the south-west in the late afternoon. It would be after seven, she calculated, before Macaulay would pass the Close on the last round of the day. She sat in the dark, listening for the slam of Red Lafferty's door across the landing to sound above the clangour of the tramcars and the shouts of the dirty children at play among the filth of the wooden stairs. It came at last. She rose from her vigil and covered her head and shoulders with a shawl, then slipped from the room.

There was a smirr of rain falling softly. Black puddles covered the courtyard, and leaking rhones dripped monotonously. But there was cheer in the archway, where, in the pallid light of a street lamp, a group of Fan-Tans, their hands in their pockets or wrapped in their shawls, their shoulders hunched, sheltered and hummed in unison the lugubrious chorus of a love-song of the halls.

"Seen Red Lafferty?" asked Bella casually and at large.

"He went oot a minute ago," answered a voice.

The chorus droned on. A taxicab roared up

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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the street. From the close-mouth opposite came a burst of coarse laughter, subsiding quickly. The drip, drip of waste water reasserted itself above the monotony of the waltz tune. Then the tune stopped sharply.

“Christ!” rasped the voice of a man.

He darted out into the street, and half-a-dozen wild men streamed after him; for there had come from down the street a squeal, the patter of running feet, the shrill alarm of police whistles, and a roar of anger. Bella Macfadyen clutched her shawl in tense fingers, but held herself back among those to whose callous souls the cycle of sounds had made no appeal.

“It’ll be old Connolly and his wife,” she said carelessly.

The others resumed the waltz tune. Life is like that in the Cowcaddens. Then the clatter of running feet came back. A man, breathless, his eyes wild, dashed in among them.

“Red Lafferty’s killed the cop!” he gasped. “Slashed him wi’ the razor! But they’ve got him . . .”

“Got him!” cried a voice sharply.

“Aye. . . . Ran into the night-duty men comin’ on roon’ the corner’. . .”

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## QUEEN OF THE FAN-TANS

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There was silence in the archway. The drip of rain-water alone competed with the tense breathing of awed men and women. A girl's hysterical voice snapped the strain.

"The King! . . . Whit'll we dae?"

"I'll tell ye whit to dae."

Bella's clear voice spoke the words. They turned to her, almost trustfully. With an unconscious gesture of imperial pride she bared her flaming head and gave the shawl a quick hitch, her back to the peeling, sweating wall.

"See here, youse," she said calmly: "I'm the boss here till Red Lafferty comes back. I'll tell ye whit to dae. See?"

Red Lafferty, they knew, would never come back. And here, surely, was their Queen.



## CHAPTER II

### CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

#### i

**O**N an afternoon of early January the cashier of the Rockvillia Co-operative Society, accompanied by a junior clerk, was driving in a cab through the mean streets of Dundashill. Opposite him, in bags and bundles, lay two days' drawings of the seven shops of the Society: a record lodgment, for the New Year trading had been heavy. One hundred and ten pounds in notes, forty-three in silver, and eight in copper were being taken to the bank.

A small, earnest man, the cashier was anxious that this passage through this district of slum-dwellings should be as short as possible. But the pallid winter sun had withdrawn after two behind a mass of clouds from the East, a cold fog had come down upon the city, and the old driver of the cab was taking his old horse cannily down the steep streets that fall away from the Canal to the high level of the Cowcaddens. Oftener than was either necessary or tactful the cashier lowered the

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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window to put out his head and project peevish questions at the man on the box. Within five minutes of their start from the Company's offices he had, with his restlessness, wellnigh unnerved the clerk. And as the musty, ill-sprung vehicle made its slow way along the grey tunnels of that district of warehouses and slums, the fog thickened and darkened, and the friendly sounds of the streets grew fainter and more faint, until they seemed to be crawling alone through an empty, mysterious world.

Somewhere near the head of Port Dundas Road the cab stopped altogether. Jumping up to protest, the cashier met a length of lead-piping aimed at his head, and fell forward, his face slithering down the padding on the door. The right-hand door was opened violently and two powerful arms dragged the clerk from the cab. He was punched violently on the point of the jaw and thrown into the gutter. A man jumped into the carriage, while a woman stood by the door and directed his actions.

"Never mind the bags o' money, Danny," she said; "tak' the notes and come on."

In a moment the man emerged, clutching two small parcels. The woman spoke to the driver.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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“ On you go, Sam.”

The old horse went off at a canter in response to a cut across its wedge-shaped rump. The man and the woman darted away into a side alley, and the fog closed behind them. The clerk rolled over in the gutter with a groan, then lay still, again.

ii

That night Mrs Agnes Cassidy had to wait up late for the return of her niece, Bella Macfadyen, Queen of the Fan-Tans. She had been instructed to remain at home that evening, for there was only one key to their single-room house, and she had had to forgo in consequence the promising joys of an evening in old Tom Wilkie's shebeen. She was afraid of her niece, and fear and self-denial and jealousy had combined to rouse her temper to its flash-point when at last, after midnight, Bella Macfadyen came in, merry and flushed with triumph, from the streets.

“ Ye've had a day of it,” said Mrs Cassidy tartly.

Bella laughed, playfully brought a tail of her red shawl across Mrs Cassidy's fat cheeks, and held out in her left hand a small parcel.

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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"A day of it!" she cried. "B'Gees, aye! See that . . . Fifty quid."

"Whit!" Mrs Cassidy was stirred out of her obsession of hate.

"Fifty quid. Are ye deaf?"

"Whaur d'ye get it?"

Bella's face lost its expression of gaiety. Her grey eyes narrowed.

"Never you mind," she said. "And ye needna' think ye'll smell a penny o't. See?" She put the bundle under the heap of rags that made a pillow for her on the floor. "They'll lie there the noo, and if I find yer dirty old fingers near them, b'Gees I'll tear yer eyes oot."

She did not turn to see the look of hatred and jealousy that flickered for a moment on the older woman's coarse features, but stooped to take off her shoes, then stood up to shake out her pile of bright hair, remove her blouse and slip out of her skirt, and at last get down among the rags on the floor to sleep. She was breathing deep and regular in sound slumber before Mrs Cassidy had blown out the oil-lamp on the mantelpiece and lowered her heavy body to the mattress they shared.

Mrs Cassidy did not sleep. This latest offence

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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to her age and authority had bitten deep into a selfish soul, already harrowed by the triumph of her brother's misbegotten child. This fiery, strong, cruel niece of hers had killed Red Lafferty, her employer, turned her into the drudge of their miserable household, flouted her and laughed at her whenever she had dared to claim independence for herself. Queen of the Fan-Tans they called her, this chit. Mrs Cassidy was a woman, and jealousy tortured her. So she lay uneasy, hot, angry stuff swirling in her brutish old mind. She turned to look now and again at the bare white throat of the girl, flushed by the dying firelight, soft and defenceless. The old fingers twitched. And she thought of the fifty pounds below that tumbled mass of auburn hair. Most of all she thought of that money, and coveted it, and hated her whose strength of character could frighten her into giving up all hope of touching it. Money: it meant power for Mrs Cassidy and freedom from the tyranny of youth, and she could not sleep for thinking of it.

In the morning the girl flicked her again on the raw. After their breakfast of bread and jam and strong tea, Bella made herself ready to go out, then took the bundle of notes from beneath her

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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pillow and put them inside a gaudy tea-caddy that stood on the mantelpiece.

"You leave thae alone," she warned Mrs Cassidy. "An' nae clipin' aboot them to that wee rat, Toddy Neil. I'll be back at six."

She threw her shawl round her shoulders and went out without taking notice of the jet of blasphemous abuse her aunt sent after her. For Mrs Cassidy had been wounded in two places. Bella's presumption that she would not dare to touch the money was an agonising affront to her vanity. But it tormented her woman's soul even more bitterly to have to listen to that harsh, contemptuous judgment of her old friend, Toddy Neil.

Toddy Neil was a contemporary of Mrs Cassidy, a shrivelled, nippy little man with a cast in his left eye. Familiar with all the villainies of Mince Collop Close, he was yet a steady worker, night-watchman in the Bell Mills by the Canal. It was the desire of these two old people to marry, at all events to live together. Faint, lingering flutters of passion still stirred in both when they were in company. They had upon them the dull need for security and kindness that comes upon the lonely and old. And if, more practically,

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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Mrs Cassidy saw in the arrangement escape from the tyranny of Bella Macfadyen's domination, Toddy Neil believed in his mean heart that Mrs Cassidy might somehow, perhaps as an expert resetter of stolen property, stand between him and the need to work.

But Bella had first laughed roughly at the idea, then, with threats, forbidden the match. She resented the idea as a vague menace to her freedom of action. Simply, she despised Toddy Neil, and had a private use for her aunt. There could be no marrying.

That was why Mrs Cassidy raged when Bella left her. Her cunning and cupidity could so far overcome her fear as to take her to the mantelpiece to lift the tea-caddy from its place and feel the bundle of notes with trembling fingers, but the knowledge that she had not the courage to help herself to the contents of the parcel only embittered her the more. In the sheer anger of futility she smashed a teacup against the wall and kicked a pair of Bella's shoes across the room. Then, hurriedly, she picked up the fragments of delf and hid them in a heap of ashes under the fire, and replaced the shoes on the rack beneath the table. She found a safer outlet for her

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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passion in raking out the fire and pipe-claying the hearthstone, adorning its edge with fanciful whorls.

About noon there came a knock on the door, and Toddy Neil shuffled in in answer to her invitation. His cunning eyes swept the room in a swift, comprehensive glance.

"She's oot?" he asked huskily confidential.

"Aye, thank God!" said Mrs Cassidy, and went on to say what she felt about her niece. It was a restless torrent of indecent abuse. Toddy Neil, his peaked cap still on his head, sat down on a wooden chair and nodded as Mrs Cassidy made her points.

"Yon yin's juist a bitch," he said at intervals, as one who agrees with a general proposition.

It took Mrs Cassidy five minutes to exhaust herself of her repression of hate and spite. Toddy Neil was an artful man and listened patiently. Then, at the first chance, he said what he had come to say.

"Whaur's the stuff she took aff the 'Co' man yesterday?" he asked.

Mrs Cassidy started. She had said nothing about that. But she knew Toddy's artfulness of old: he had a way of finding out the secrets



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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of Mince Collop Close. She could only temporise while the small man's beady eyes still mused on the fire.

"I'm no' richt sure," stammered Mrs Cassidy.  
"She tell't me . . ."

Toddy Neil turned his keen, knowing glance on her heavy face.

"C'm on, Aggie," he said. "Ye ken fine whaur it is."

She handed him down the tea-caddy without another word. Mrs Cassidy was easily dominated. He took off the lid, emptied out the bundle into his left hand, and weighed it judicially.

"How much?" he asked.

"Fifty."

Toddy Neil laughed tonelessly. He handed back the caddy. There was a leer of cunning on the face he turned fully now to his gossip.

"Whit about it, Aggie?" he asked.

"We canna'! . . . We darena'! . . . Oh, Toddy! She'd kill me . . ."

"Whit if she didna' get the chance?"

"How? Whit d'ye mean, Toddy?"

He stood up, and with his cap on he was still six inches shorter than Mrs Cassidy. But there

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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was knowledge and secretive mastery in his gnarled face.

“I’ll get her oot the road,” he said boldly. “Ruddy high time, too. I’ll get her three years, an’ me an’ you’ll get that fifty quid, b’Gees!”

Toddy Neil could have informed the police—they would have been glad to hear of Bella’s part in the robbery with assault of the officials of the Rockvilla Co-operative Society—but Toddy lacked fortitude and feared the vengeance of the Fan-Tans, and he loved intrigue, and at last he had a safe plan—a pinch, he said.

“Listen, Aggie . . .” he whispered, coming close to her.

They muttered together for half-an-hour, jumping guiltily to every noise in the courtyard outside. Toddy Neil was earnest in his pleadings, but Mrs Cassidy hesitated.

“Ye don’t ken her as weel as I dae,” she assured him again and again.

But he won her over. They could hurt her, do her in, put her out of the road for years. Mrs Cassidy could not resist that great feminine satisfaction—to hurt Bella, really break her. Then she and Toddy would be free to live together. It was too much for her dull discretion.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"A' richt, Toddy," she agreed at length.  
"Awa' ye go an' smash her—blast her face!"

"You wait," said Toddy meanly. He winked at her and shuffled away.

Hurrying on his short legs, his knees knocking, Toddy Neil passed quickly across Mince Collop Close and through the archway to the street, where he turned to the East. In a blind alley off Fleming Street he found his crony, Sam Tosh, brushing down a horse while he produced between his teeth a sibilant monotone. The purple face of the cabman effloresced into a grin when he looked up to see his friend approach.

"Hullo, Toddy!" he cried cheerfully. "Whit's bitin' ye?"

"See here, Sam," said Toddy, and drew him into the shed that served both as stable and coach-house.

Sam Tosh listened with interest. The owner of his own horse and cab, he was free from illusions about his professional integrity. He was always ready to oblige—for a consideration. Only the day before he had assisted Bella Macfadyen in a small matter—and had yet proved his devotion to duty by driving back like fury to the offices of the Rockvilla Co-operative Society with the

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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balance of its bank-lodgment and the insensible body of its cashier. The Directors had been impressed by his account of how he had laid about the roughs with his whip. Always ready to oblige—that was Sam. And this was a pretty proposition that Toddy had to make to him. He listened with a grin on his big face.

“Gees, Toddy!” he approved the plan at length. “But ye’re a great wee warrior. I’ll awa’ and chase her up noo. Whaur’s ma coat?”

He pulled on the long garment of his caste and, bidding Toddy Neil farewell at the end of the lane, set out on a round of the public-houses in the neighbourhood. He found the Queen of the Fan-Tans and her henchman, Danny Gregg, in the Eagle Tavern that looks out on the grass-grown wharves and turbid waters of the Canal basin. His famous leering wink saluted them.

“Aye, Bella,” said he. “There ye are, as fresh as paint.”

He glanced round to see that the bar was empty and that the barman was busy pumping beer from the depths. His voice dropped.

“It wis a nate job ye made of it yesterday, right enough.”

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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A dry smile passed over the cool face of the Queen of the Fan-Tans.

"No' bad," she conceded, but as one who would leave the matter there. "Whit's yours, Sam?"

"A gless an' a pint," said Sam; and went on breezily: "There's anither wee job ye could be doin' the nicht, if ye like."

"Aye?" said Bella dryly, her eyes steadying.

Again the cabman looked round warily. He brought his huge torso forward in a confidential pose.

"It's the Bell Mills. I wis doon at the bank for them the day wi' the cashier. Overtime and bonus to be paid the morn. Nae less than five hunner' quid, I'll bate ye. An' he aye works late, the cashier, makin' it up—juist him an' a peely-wally office-boy. He'll be there the nicht. Eh?"

He gulped his glass of whisky and half-emptied his goblet of beer in one draught, affecting an unruffled, business-like manner. But his pig eyes dwelt on the inscrutable face of Bella Macfadyen. She was staring at a row of bright bottles on a rack. Sam Tosh timed his next remark carefully.

"It's only wee Toddy Neil that's the watchman."

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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"T'hell wi' him," said Bella curtly, her gaze still straight before her.

Sam Tosh's heavy forefinger traced diagrams within the ring of beer his glass had stencilled on the counter. It was Danny Gregg who spoke next, after a pause.

"We canna' break into the place."

"And we're no' gaun' to try," said Bella.

"Naebody's askin' ye," said Sam Tosh lightly. "I'm juist tellin' ye, an' ye can tak' it or leave it. But a quid to Paddy Boyle, the fireman in the boiler-hoose, 'll pass ye in when ye like."

He emptied his mug of beer and corrected the angle of his battered lacquered hat.

"I'll awa' noo, then," he spoke casually. "Ye'll no' forget an auld frien' if ye tak' the tip, Bella, will ye? So long."

He lurched away, and the swing-doors swished behind him. Danny Gregg's thin, whimsical face turned to Bella's. There was little need for words. The hard flash had come into her eyes, and about her lips was a grim sardonic smile.

"I'll dae it, if it's juist to spite Toddy Neil," she said.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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### iii

The Bell Mills stand on the edge of the Canal. The back wall of the building, four storeys high, rises sheer out of those black, sluggish waters and casts livid shadows on their surface. The Canal is derelict nearly. Grass grows on the wharves and tow-paths, and only a thin, broken stream of traffic goes through where once the cross-country business of Scotland sustained a brisk community on the northern edge of Glasgow. But if decay is there now, the place has the dignity of age, and the old mills and warehouses that border the Canal have taken on the colour and soft grace of antiquity, brooding, as it seems to the sensitive eye, on the glories of a prosperity that has departed to regions where the railway and the coal-mine serve the nervous commerce of the day.

They made flour in the Bell Mills in those days. The front that faced South and away from the Canal was blanched with the stuff, white fans of it spreading upwards across the stone from the tops of every window. On the first floor at the back was the dispatch store, from which, by a primitive block-and-tackle arrangement, sus-

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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pended from a beam built in above a wide doorway, the sacks were lowered to the barges, that could be moored hard against the thick foundations of the building.

The business was like that — old-fashioned, controlled by an old-fashioned man, a hard bachelor trained in a mid-Victorian school, fiercely sceptical of modern business methods. The building, the plant, the methods, the tone of the Bell Mills were obsolete. They produced good flour, and they were moving towards decay. Even the staff—from old Gillanders, the cashier, to Toddy Neil, night-watchman—had none of the hurrying vigour of the new commerce, but pottered along with the easy, colourless sobriety of the seventies, when the Bell Mills were the pride of the trade in Scotland.

On a Friday night in January of that last year of the Mills' existence—the year in which John Bell, junior, died and the white building was closed down — old Gillanders was busy in his dingy office on the ground-floor. Dignified in mutton-chop whiskers, with cylinders of oil-cloth protecting the cuffs of his black jacket, he was working in an orderly and sedate fashion with bundles of notes and rouleaux of silver and coppers.



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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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A pale boy hung about in sedulous attendance, now checking a pay and placing it in a buff envelope, then ticking off a sum at the dictation of his senior on a long, neat paysheet. They had worked together in the gaslight, almost in silence, for more than an hour. Old Gillanders was efficient in his old-fashioned way, and to-night he tackled his duties with a specially solemn care; for this was a record pay for the Bell Mills, and he was proudly conscious of the magnificent comparison it made with the grand old days of John Bell, senior. The pale boy was anxious, but proud of his association with this capable old gentleman, who handled hundreds with a sort of courtly ease. Slowly, but with unquestionable accuracy, the envelopes were filled; surely and steadily the rouleaux of coins dwindled and disappeared.

Their work was interrupted only once in the course of the first hour. In response to a knock, old Gillanders put himself squarely between the cash and the door and steadily invited the unknown to enter. It was Macnab, a storekeeper they had pensioned off five years before. He was apologetic in the manner of the old-fashioned working man. Toddy Neil, the night-watchman, it appeared, was

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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taken ill and had sent word to him to report at the Mills for duty in his stead. And here he was. He hoped that it would be all right.

"That will be all right, Macnab," said Mr Gillanders generously.

The old man touched the polished skip of his cap and withdrew. Mr Gillanders turned to his work. By half-past eight the task was finished.

"We shall not close the envelopes, John," said Mr Gillanders to the boy. "It will be wise to check them over first thing in the morning."

"Yes, sir," agreed John, impressed by this thoroughness.

"And now we shall put the envelopes in the safe. Gather them into the baskets according to the departments, John."

He took a bundle of keys from his pocket, selected one patiently, and opened the heavy door of a strong-room built into the wall. The boy, bent over the envelopes on the table, heard him in there, moving books and deed-boxes to make room for the baskets. Then he screamed wildly. A hand had seized him by the neck, a cold, hard hand. He dropped the basket he was filling. The pallid, interrogative face of Mr Gillanders, framed ludicrously in the mutton-chop whiskers,

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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appeared at the door of the safe. Then John felt himself slung with terrific force against the portly person of his chief. They fell together on the stone floor of the strong-room. The heavy door closed with a puff upon them, and the key was turned in the lock. They shouted together:

"Help! Help! He-elp!"

"Shut yer mooth," said a gruff voice without. "Shut it, noo, or I'll come in and flatten the two of youse."

But still they yelled. Then a woman's voice spoke.

"Never mind them, Danny. Naeboddy'll hear. Stuff yer pooches wi' thae envelopes and come on."

Danny Gregg smiled at his Queen and obeyed.

"It's easy," he said with relish.

They crushed the envelopes in their hands and crammed them into pockets and odd corners of their dress. There was no time to discriminate, for the duet of alarm from the safe, if almost laughably muffled, was persistent. Bella Macfadyen paused once to emit her dry, scornful laugh.

"It would be a pant if Toddy Neil came up," she chuckled. "I'd like to see ye swipe him, Danny."

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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But no one answered the shouts of the prisoners in the dungeon of the safe. They finished their work uninterrupted, screwed out the single jet of gas, and tiptoed from the room, carrying their shoes in their hands.

They hesitated in the passage outside. It was dark, and they had not taken the trouble to master the lay-out of that rambling building. They debated in whispers. The watchman would be in his box at the main door—only Toddy Neil, but Bella knew that he would rejoice to betray her. The task was to find a road back to the boiler-house. Very cautiously they made their way along the unlighted passage, searching for that dark flight of stairs up which they had entered the main building, to be guided to their goal by the chink of coins. But there was dead silence in the place now, and they had no torch to search the crannies.

They were brought up short at the head of a flight of wooden stairs, on the lower treads of which glimmered a faint sheen of light. Holding their breaths, they heard a heavy footstep down there. An old man's voice, with a quaver in it, called:

“ Who's there ? ” •

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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Silence, perfect and profound. Then the old voice spoke, as if to a companion.

"I'll swear I heard something, Joe," it said.

Silence. Then the old voice again, chuckling.

"We'll wait here. I locked the door at the heid o' the boiler-house stairs before I 'phoned the police. This is the only way oot, and they'll no' get past here. And they'll dae nothin' till old Gillanders clears out. We've got them easy."

Danny Gregg, tense against the wall seven yards away, felt Bella's hand on his elbow and her warm breath on his ear as she whispered:

"He's a liar. There's the Canal."

They turned and crept away from the stairs, retracing their steps until they reached the door of the cashier's office again. The dim thunder of the prisoners' wrath still reverberated within. But there was no time to listen. Danny Gregg led the way swiftly along the passage, which turned here to the right. He stubbed his toe on the lowest of a flight of steps that led up into a void of blackness above them. An idea came as quickly as the involuntary curse. He remembered the block-and-tackle that, from the north bank of the Canal, lazily, he had often watched dropping

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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the dusty sacks to the flat barges. Bella followed him lithely, taking the steps two at a time.

They found themselves on a level floor, but in utter blackness. But the place smelled differently from the office flat, and they put out fumbling hands to feel the taut canvas of sacks ready for dispatch. Holding to each other, they felt their way round the huge bings to a passage that ran towards the back wall. In a moment Danny's hands were feeling for the bolts on the shaky double door that opened on to the Canal. A rattle, a creak or two—and the livid water, oily and horrible, was beneath them. Above gleamed a strip of starry sky. The tackle had been left hanging on the pulley, its ends looped through a ring in the sill of the doorway. Thirty feet below lay an empty barge.

Swiftly they knotted together the laces of their shoes and slung them round their necks. Danny freed the tackle and tested it. The pulley screamed; but there was no choice.

•“Now, Bella,” he said quietly.

She passed the loop over her head and under her arms, and Danny gave the rope a turn round one of the iron columns that supported the roof. Their eyes met. •

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Second hoose for the Pavilion," said Bella flippantly. "On ye go."

A short, steady pull, and she was off her feet, swinging out gently over the gleaming ditch below. On the return she steadied herself against the sill with a foot outstretched. He let her drop easily, paying out the slack penuriously, till her voice came up, cheerful but strange, from below:

"Half a mo'," she called softly. "There ye are!"

The sling came back, and he prepared to adjust it round his own shoulders. But a noise within the building paralysed him for a moment. From below there came the sound of heavy, hurrying feet, of shouts, keen and excited. The police! He dropped the rope into space and, grasping the beam overhead, worked his body to the edge of the sill and from there, hanging precariously by one arm, closed the double doors behind him. With her heart knocking in her throat Bella watched him, agile but small above her, kick out along the beam hand over hand till he found a grip on the pendent rope. Down that, swinging wildly, he slipped like a monkey.

"That's that," he said curtly. "The polis are there noo!"

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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They were safe so far. But the barge in which they cowered was moored fast to rings in the slimy wall, and there was no current in these dead waters to carry it away could they have released it. Neither could swim; they were of a people that would almost as soon face death as cold water. It seemed that they had blundered into a trap.

A dreadful silence was about them. From the building they had just left came no sound whatever. The deadness of the Canal was on everything. Only the shimmer of the high stars hinted at movement and life. They were in a dungeon, a pit with walls deep and unscalable, murky, silent, like a tomb. There was not even the rustling of wavelets on the wall against which the barge was moored. That water about them was stagnant and dead.

"Well, Danny?" said Bella at last, shivering.

He only shrugged his shoulders. Words were useless. They might get back up that rope. The policeman might investigate the dispatch store and find the doors ajar. Or they might have to wait till dawn, eleven cold hours, for nine o'clock had just rung from a steeple. It was all with chance. . . . •



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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" Maybe they'll be shiftin' timber through the night," he said to Bella. " Maybe no' . . ."

The Timber Basin lay only a hundred yards to the right, but so recessed into the north bank of the Canal that they had seen no movement in that direction. But as he spoke, hopelessly, Danny glanced involuntarily that way. He clutched Bella's wrist.

" Gees, oh! Look . . ."

A triangle of lights gleamed above the blackness of the water along there. It was a narrow-shouldered triangle when they saw it first, but it grew before their fascinated eyes to an equilateral shape. A small tug, probably a launch, was emerging from the basin. So slowly did the triangle change its form, Danny dared to guess that it had a raft of timber in tow. Listening intently, they could hear the slow throb of the engine, like a pulse knocking in the night. Shortly there came the hoarse, strange cries of the workers coaxing a raft round the shoulder of the basin.

" Stand by, Bella! " whispered Danny. •

They lay flat in the stern-sheets of the barge. Through a hawse-hole Danny watched the launch approach. He saw the funnel as it crossed the slit of sky between the silhouettes of two great

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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buildings. It was creeping slowly, ever so slowly, at something less than a man's walking pace. The tow was a heavy one. He prayed that it would be broad enough to cover the width of the Canal.

The launch passed. They saw the glow from the stokehold on the bearded face of the steersman. Then something bumped lazily under the counter of the barge on which they lay. Danny raised his head; and it seemed that the Canal had been lighted up by the sheen of fresh pitch-pine logs. Dimly against that vague glow there stood out the figures of two men, resting on the long peavies of their craft. Behind them stretched the raft, sluggish, undulating and unattended.

Now the logs were knocking and tearing along the side of the barge, but Danny waited until the launch was but a glowing spot in the blackness to the left and the figures of the lumbermen had merged again into the night. He waited till he saw the end of the raft approach, like something alive, the water eddying greasily in its wake.

"Now!" he whispered.

They stood up. He threw himself over, and the logs sagged horribly beneath him, the water glucking up through the wide interstices. Bella walked forward slowly to keep abreast of him,

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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then, steadying herself by his hand, stood up on the gunwale of the barge and stepped lightly down beside him. She had to grip him to save her balance as the logs bobbed under the extra weight.

"Down," said Danny curtly.

They lay out flat, their faces close to the fragrant wood. They had not been seen. The launch throbbed on its cautious way, and the barge disappeared into the dark behind them. They could see ahead now—the pale lights of the rows of lamps along the wharves of the Old Basin. Against that greenish sheen the shape of the launch and the figures of the lumbermen were outlined vaguely. But they felt secure on the edge of the raft, which bumped sluggishly against the walls of the Canal.

Then a voice spoke from the launch ahead. The lumbermen moved. The logs bumped and groaned as the tow was dropped. They looked up to see that the raft lay motionless in the Basin, heaving lazily on the backwash of the launch. Danny tapped his companion's shoulder •

They crawled in towards the shadow under the wharf where the logs were grinding on the stone. They dared to stand up, then moved slowly along the raft till they found the iron rungs of a ladder

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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projecting above their heads. Swiftly they clambered up to earth again and crouched, recovering breath, in the shelter of a decrepit weigh-box.

"That wis a piece of luck," said Bella calmly. She rose and moved round the box to look about the wharf. It was deserted. But from the window of the Eagle Tavern there gleamed a hospitable light. She turned back to Danny. "Whit price a drink?"

"B'Gees, yes!" said he fervently. "But can we risk it?"

It was as if with their return to dry land he had handed back the leadership to his Queen. She smiled: her dangerous smile it was.

"Stuff the money under the box an' come on," she ordered.

They emptied their pockets and garments of the rustling envelopes, gathered them in a rough bundle within a red cotton handkerchief, and thrust it behind one of the concrete blocks on which the box was raised. Then, boldly, they walked across the causeway to the door of the public-house and pushed it open.

There was little stir within. Two navvies stood at one end of an arm of the horseshoe bar

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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arguing truculently, and from a cubicle came a low mutter of voices. The Eagle Tavern was doing poor business at this dull end of the week. The barman advanced jauntily.

“ Well, Bella, whit’s it to be ? ”

She gave her order, and he handed it over, remarking conversationally:

“ Your aunt’s in there wi’ Toddy Neil.”

He jerked his head towards the cubicle, took the coin she offered, and clattered the change on the counter. Then he turned back to the evening paper he had been reading. Bella exchanged a glance with Danny Gregg. They listened intently. Toddy Neil’s half-drunken voice came over the partition to them.

“ I’ve settled her, I’m tellin’ ye, Aggie. It’s three years for her an’ Danny Gregg. That’ll learn her to interfere . . . ”

The voice maundered on. Bella whispered in Danny’s ear:

“ Drink up quick! ”

They emptied their glasses at once and went out with a casual word to the barman. Round the corner of that solitary building they halted to wait. It lacked only five minutes of closing time. The navvies emerged, and they heard them move

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## CHALLENGE TO THE QUEEN

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off, still wrangling over their stupid politics, in the opposite direction. Then the professional voice of the barman sounded within.

"Time, please! Time!"

He came out to close one half of the outer door. Shortly the voices of Toddy Neil and his gossip mingled with his in a jumble of meaningless pleasantries. The old people came on. And as Toddy Neil turned the corner, a fist crashed on his jaw, so that he was swung off his light legs into the gutter. He lay in a huddle there. Mrs Cassidy had no time to scream, for Bella's shawl was pressed tight over her mouth, and Bella's voice whispered passionately in her ear:

"Not a word, ye auld randy, or I'll tear yer eyes oot!"

Mrs Cassidy quivered and was still. Bella took the shawl from her face. There was abject fear in it.

"Awa' hame, ye auld fool," the girl commanded contemptuously. "Awa' hame oot o' this."

Mrs Cassidy went. When her large figure had staggered out of sight round a corner, Bella dived for the sprawling legs of Toddy Neil.

"Lift," she ordered; and Danny seized the

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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narrow shoulders. "Ower to the box wi' him."

They hurried across the wharf to where they had hidden the stolen money. Bella dragged out the bundle, untied the knot, and began to stuff the envelopes into the pockets of Toddy Neil.

"Here—Bella . . ." Danny remonstrated.

"Every penny of it," she said fiercely, and went on with her work, till the handkerchief lay empty and the pockets of the unconscious man were bulging with the incriminating stuff. She rose to her feet and again seized the puny ankles.

"Now—heave! "

Roughly they slung the carcass of Toddy Neil out on to the raft. It fell with a muffled thud. The logs heaved a moment, then were still again.

"That'll settle him," said Bella grimly. "If the timber men don't find him, the polis will."

## CHAPTER III

### THE CENTRE FORWARD

#### i

**W**HEN it became known, two days before the Scottish Cup Final, that Jimsy Mackee had been transferred from the Kirkintilloch Harp to the Kelvin Rangers, the sub-editors of the evening papers, shrewd assessors of the public's sense of values, cut out of their sheets an announcement relating to an outbreak of war between Turkey and Greece and substituted, under a variety of heavy headlines, this item of news of such deep significance for the Scottish people.

For Jimsy was known to be Scotland's greatest centre forward, and had often been so described in public print. Of less than medium stature—he was but five feet two inches in height—"he made up in brains what he lacked in inches," as the sporting experts had it. Born in Mince Collop Close, Cowcaddens, he had derived from a somewhat obscure parentage a pair of tough, bandy legs and a swift cunning in action that



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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made him peerless in his time and calling. "Wee Jimsy" the football public of Glasgow dubbed him, exalting him by the familiarity. At the age of twenty he was a public character.

Yet his was a normal rise to fame. His natural talent for the game had been observed by the manager of a junior club as he was taking part in a rough-and-tumble on a piece of waste ground near the Canal. He was given a trial, then an engagement. - At the end of that season his club had risen to prosperity and a high position in the League. He was a marked man. A Second Division club bought him in. That year, the last match (which raised his team to the leadership of the Division) left Jimsy with the Scottish record of forty-seven goals to his credit. His name was freely mentioned when the time came to select the Scottish XI. against England.

But Jimsy stayed on at Kirkintilloch, refusing offers from London and the Black Country. Even the advances of Sir James Hoare Raith, Bart., Chairman of Directors of the Glasgow Rovers Football Club Limited—First League Leaders and Holders of the Scottish Cup—were repelled. In vain the temptations, the laudatory articles of the sporting journalists, and the cries of the

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## *THE CENTRE FORWARD*

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public. Accidentally or no, Jimsy let his fame increase and his transfer fee accumulate while he bided his time in Stirlingshire. All the more tremendous was the sensation when the Kelvin Rangers got him at the record figure of £5500.

The situation in the competition for the Scottish Cup had not that year appeared unusually interesting. The Glasgow Rovers, of course, had reached the Final with ease. On the other hand, their great rivals, their proper opponents in the culminating test, the Bridgeton Hibernians, had inexplicably fallen to a provincial eleven. The glory of that provincial club had lasted for a week only, at the end of which they were soundly thrashed by the Heart of Midlothian. The subsequent Semi-Final produced a second surprise. The Hearts were beaten ! That poorest and least conspicuous of Glasgow clubs, the Kelvin Rangers, having, by the luck of the ballot, muddled their way so far as the Semi-Final, seem to have been galvanised into efficiency by the accident. They drew with the Hearts in Edinburgh and beat them at home. It was to be a Glasgow Final, after all.

But it held no promise of sensation. Nothing, it seemed, could stand against the skill—and the exchequer—of the Rovers, least of all a team that

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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had fallen twice to their prowess in the League competitions by 4—0 and 6—1 respectively. Despite the traditional chanciness of Cup Ties, the betting was at the rate of five to one against the Rangers. A poor Final, indeed !

Then, without warning, came this announcement that Scotland's greatest centre forward would lead the attack of the despised Rangers in the Final. The public did not think at all of what this had meant in hard work to the Directors of that impoverished club—of intrigue, of a feverish begging for capital, of difficult dealings with the vanity of Jimsy Mackee and the truculent greed of his Kirkintilloch employers. The people were content with garrulous debate and eager, surprised anticipation of a great Cup Final, infinitely more interesting than any war in the Near East. And the odds against the Kelvin Rangers fell from five to one to evens.

### ii

Attracted by the hoarse cries of a newsboy, Eddie Moore, a native of the South Side Ghetto, felt in his pocket for a penny and bought a paper. The legend on the bill that floated from the boy's waist had produced a nervous shock in his sensi-

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## THE CENTRE FORWARD

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tive system. On the kerb he halted to read the announcement that Jimsy Mackee would play for the Kelvin Rangers in the Cup Final, and there he stood for a while, thinking deeply. His lips moved to utter a curse. Then, thoughtfully, he made his way up Renfield Street towards the North.

It took him five minutes to pass through the main thoroughfares into the quarter of mean streets at the head of the hill. A quick, lithe figure in a blue suit of flashy cut, bowler hat, broad-toed shoes with fancy laces, and shirt and collar of lilac hue, he passed here and there on the fringe of the Cowcaddens, his dark eyes ranging restlessly. At last, under the arcade of the Theatre Royal, he stopped to accost Bella Macfadyen, Queen of the Fan-Tans.

"That you, Bella?" said he with fine surprise.

"Hullo, Sheeny!" answered Bella coolly.

But Eddie Moore was in no mood for badinage. He had financial worries on his mind.

"See here, Bella," he said in his quick, stealthy voice, "I got a game on. You coming in?"

"Depends," said Bella distantly.

"It's a good game," said Mr Moore fervently and with characteristic economy of phrase. "You like to hear?"

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"I've plenty of time," answered Bella easily.  
"Go on, Sheeny."

He explained himself in a rapid whisper. Early in the football season he had, for a heavy sum—and he indicated its heaviness with lavish Oriental gesture—backed the Rovers again to win both the First League Competition and the Scottish Cup. Of these feats the first was already achieved; the flag was theirs for a certainty. But this Jimsy Mackee had signed on for the Kelvin Rangers. Now it was not so certain that the Cup would rest for another year on Sir James Hoare Raith's sideboard . . .

"Whit about it?" asked Bella.

"It jist must not be," said Moore with fierce certainty. "Listen . . ."

He lowered his voice, but the words came faster and faster. He had thought it out. Jimsy Mackee could hardly be prevented from playing, but he could be so dealt with that he would play badly. Eddie Moore rubbed his yellow hands. With Jimsy's failure to play to form, the Kelvin Rangers must fall to pieces in the Final.

"See?" asked Moore eagerly.

"Go on," said Bella.

It would be easy. He knew Jimsy. The

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## THE CENTRE FORWARD

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man was susceptible to flattery. Jimsy would be taken in hand on the Friday night. Training or no training, he would be flattered into drinking a glass of beer with his old friend and admirer, Eddie Moore, in O'Hara's pub. Then there might be another glass. Then, after some friendly conversation, a glass of American rye for Jimsy—by arrangement with Peter Macinulty behind the bar—and, perhaps, just a flick of cigar ash into his tumbler. The Jew paused . . .

“Then you come in, my dear.”

He leered at her obscenely, but Bella did not speak. She was smiling faintly, her eyes on a barrel-organ that was charming the Cowcaddens with a jaded waltz. Then she took to humming the air.

“Vell?” asked the Jew explosively.

“I wis juist wonderin’,” said Bella, “whit I get oot of it.”

Moore was ready for that. He would hand her ten pounds to put on in her own name against the Kelvin Rangers. He mentioned the book-maker with whom he dealt—a reliable man. She would get half the winnings.

Bella took up her tune again. His dark, restless eyes examined her face.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"Vell?" he asked once more.

She looked down on him with cold eyes.

"You Sheenies are terrible careless wi' yer money," she said dryly.

The Jew protested elaborately. It was good money, and it was easily made.

"Aye! easy for you," Bella withered him. "Mak' it twenty."

"Twenty to you! — not possible!" Mr Moore almost shrieked. "Can't do it."

"A' right," said Bella easily. "Neither can I."

She turned as if to go, but her arm was impulsively held.

"See here," said Mr Moore, "I'll get it somehow. Give you it in O'Hara's pub. this afternoon at three. Is that right?"

"Right," said Bella cheerfully.

The offence to his racial scruples was written on Moore's face when he handed Bella the notes behind a screen in O'Hara's public-house later in the day.

"You put that on right," he growled. "On the Rovers, see?"

"Keep yer hair on," said Bella.

She went straight to the office of the bookmaker Moore had named.

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## THE CENTRE FORWARD

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"Pit that on the Kelvin Rangers in the Cup Final for me," she said.

The agent was surprised.

"Kelvin Rangers! Not the Rovers?"

"D'ye no' hear whit I said? On the Rangers."

He handed her a slip by way of acknowledgment. Bella folded it carefully and put it away inside her blouse.

### iii

Eddie Moore had made it a point of policy all his life to commend himself, whenever possible, to distinguished men. The mock humility of the subtle seeker of advantages was his in perfection. When he encountered Jimsy Mackee in Sauchiehall Street that Friday night, his greeting was respectful, and it elicited a jovial response.

Jimsy, conscious of greatness, had walked along Sauchiehall Street just in order that he might be thus obsequiously recognised. Greatness was his, and it was in him to enjoy it all, down to a study of the expressions on the faces of those who, traversing the busiest street in the city, recognised his Gothic features and nudged their companions and stared. And Eddie Moore was the first to stop him and pronounce his name loudly. Jimsy



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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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was delighted. Adroitly, the Jew played to his simple vanity, and with every sentence of praise Jimsy's appetite for it increased. He fell in readily with the suggestion that they should go together to O'Hara's public-house for a drink.

There, at the special bar, one of a gay, talkative company—well-dressed persons like Eddie Moore, young ladies in large hats, and vaudeville artists refreshing themselves between acts in the romantic disguise of make-up—Jimsy was happy. He was generally recognised. Loungers sought his acquaintance, the barman leaned over to whisper obsequious congratulations, the young ladies smiled to him. . . . Jimsy forgot himself. He saw it was a glass of beer that had been put before him, but the fact made no impression on him. Only for a moment did he pull himself together, to refuse the offer of a cigar. He must keep in form for the great game. Mr Moore would understand. Jimsy went on to tell how he would win the match. He enlarged on this point. Eddie Moore said: "By God, yes!" fervently at intervals. A good sort, Eddie.

Jimsy had a second glass of beer. He did not notice that it had been placed before him, because he was busy explaining to a group of friendly

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## *THE CENTRE FORWARD*

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people why his new team was bound to win on the morrow.

"By God, yes!" agreed Mr Moore.

Jimmy protested against a third glass. He must have his head clear in the morning. He was going to score three goals against the Rovers or burst. . . . They said that Pate Johnson was the greatest living goalkeeper. Pate was going to be made to look silly. As if to emphasise his determination, Jimsy Mackee finished the third glass of beer in one prolonged draught.

That third glass of beer was one too much for Jimsy's sense. He was not drunk; but his critical faculties were blunted. He did not see the danger in the glass of whisky which was put before him. He did not see the bottle out of which Peter Macinulty decanted it—it bore the device of the crossed flags of the Union; nor did he notice that Eddie Moore's little finger deftly flicked a pinch of cigar ash into the glass. He saw nothing but future glory. He drank a mouthful of the crude stuff, and was vaguely aware that it seemed to be upsetting his metabolism . . .

It was at this point that Jimsy was distracted from himself and from football. On the other

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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side of the horseshoe bar stood a tall woman, deep-breasted and shapely, with a Spanish comb in a high pile of burning hair, and she was looking at him through half-closed, interested eyes. He nudged the Jew's elbow and jerked a stupid head towards the girl.

"Go on, then," said Eddie Moore. "She's all right."

Jimsey seized his glass and set out. His head was swimming, and he jostled a dozen people before he made a place for himself beside the tall girl. He placed his glass on the counter and put his face close to hers.

"I'm gaun hame wi' you," he said amorously.

"Are ye?"

She turned quickly. Her elbow upset his glass. Jimsey was hurt.

"Easy on!" he growled; then, more enthusiastically: "We'll have another."

He waved an arm to attract a barman. It was pulled down.

"No' here," the woman whispered in his ear. "I've a bottle at hame. Come on. . . ."

He went, lurching at her side, a look of fatuous triumph on his face. Men turned from their drinks to look at them, but few recognised Jimsey

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## *THE CENTRE FORWARD*

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Mackee in his cups. The majority laughed at the absurdity of his unstable bandy legs, at the ludicrous figure cut by his short body beside the slim, straight height of his companion.

The fresh air of Renfield Street seemed to add an aggravating element to the poison within him. He lost control of his legs; his speech became incoherent in its crude sensuality. Only the strength of his companion, whose long arm was round his waist lifting him forward, took him up the hill to the comparative quiet of Garscadden Street. There she let him drop asprawl on some steps leading to a dark doorway. He lay and mumbled of his lust. The woman stood on guard, her eyes open for the approach of a policeman. A church clock struck nine.

At length a young man appeared beside them.

"This the wee squirt, Bella?" he asked quietly, bending down to examine Jimsy with contemptuous eyes.

"That's him, Danny," said Bella curtly. "Get him up."

They took an arm each. Very swiftly, so that his useless legs seemed hardly to touch the ground, they hurried him by dark, devious ways towards the North. Jimsy mumbled; now and again his

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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voice rose in obscene protest. But his hearers did not stop to argue. They hurried on, and, at last, turning in under a dark low archway, dragged Jimsy up a flight of worn, wooden stairs, opened a rickety door, and laid him on the floor of a bare dark room. The young man vanished and reappeared with a lighted candle, only to vanish again. Jimsy rubbed his eyes and looked at Bella. Desire came over him again.

"What about that whisky?" he asked in a thick voice.

"Wait an' I'll get it."

She went out. The door closed behind her. A key was turned in the lock. Jimsy waited—and waited. . . .

At length he was glad to fall asleep.

iv

There was a whimsical smile on the face of the young man who wakened Jimsy at seven o'clock next morning, for Jimsy looked ill and remorseful. The whites of his eyes had turned yellow and were streaked with threads of blood; his face was sickly and lined; his hair was dank and tousled, and his first conscious expression betrayed the fact that he felt as bad as he looked.

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## THE CENTRE FORWARD

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The smile on Danny Gregg's face exasperated Jimsy. He was ashamed, and he was ready to blame the rest of the world for the trouble in which he found himself. He advanced on the young man.

"Lemme oot o' this!"

Danny Gregg leaned against the door. He was seven inches taller than Jimsy and had the look of a boxer.

"Ye'll stay where you are," he said deliberately. "Ye let that swine Eddie Moore tak' a lend o' ye last night, and I'm gaun to put ye right. See? Ye've got to win that match the day. See? So ye'll juist keep your mooth shut and dae whit ye're telt till we tak' ye doon to the field. See?"

Jimsy's head ached. He was angry; his vanity was bruised. But he was too weary and sick to argue.

"Ach to pot!" he said with perfect fatalism.

The young man left the room and locked the door behind him. Shortly he returned, still smiling. His arms were round a wooden tub, half-full of cold water; between his teeth he carried a pair of flesh gloves. Jimsy looked up sullenly.

"Whit's a' this?" he growled.

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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“Strip,” said Danny curtly. “This’ll do ye good.”

Jimsey stripped. A cold bath was what he wanted. Training. . . . He looked curiously at the young man, who was shaking out a rough towel in a very business-like fashion. Breathing deeply, his arms crossed over his broad and hairy chest, Jimsey stepped into the tub. It was cold, but good. With gusto, he sluiced the water over his knotted limbs and his hot, aching head. Then the gratifying glow under the rasp of the towel. Jimsey began to feel clean again. He smiled when Danny Gregg, the flesh gloves on his hands, advanced upon him, and inflated his chest to meet their prickly pressure. The young man plied them with the dexterity of a scientist.

“Ye’ve got the touch, right enough,” Jimsey was forced to acknowledge.

He was very thoroughly dressed down, and he took it gratefully, standing quietly with the towel round his middle. With a final sharp rub up and down the bandy legs of the centre forward, the young man, panting and perspiring, stopped work.

“That’ll dae ye,” he said. “Feel better?”

“Fine,” said Jimsey. .

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## THE CENTRE FORWARD

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His trainer smiled.

"I'll awa' noo an' get yer breakfast," he said. "Ye can carry on wi' the skippin'-rope till I'm ready."

Jimsey carried on, his odd little legs twinkling cheerfully as he swung the rope with his powerful wrists. He put in a good ten minutes of varied exercise before the young man returned bearing a tumbler. Jimsey laughed.

"It's a wee taste o' salts," explained the young man. "Do ye good."

"Jings! Ye'd think it wis a nursin' hame," said Jimsey, and drank.

He was given breakfast, plain but satisfying—a plate of ham and eggs, tea, and bread and butter. The young man gathered the empty dishes.

"Now, Jimsey," he said pleasantly, "juist you lie doon and have a bit doss to yersel'. Whit time are ye due at the field?"

"Wan o'clock."

"I'll away oot and get a taxi to come for ye, then. • Juist you tak' it easy."

And Jimsey slept the morning through on a pile of bedclothes in the corner of the bare, dingy room. He wakened, refreshed, to find the woman of the night before standing •over him. Bella was



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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dressed in her best, from her patent shoes and silk stockings to the Spanish comb in the dome of golden hair above the tartan shawl. She grinned at him, as to an old friend.

"How's things, Jimsy?" she asked pleasantly.

"Fine!" said Jimsy, and rose.

"Come on, then," said Bella. "The taxi's waitin'."

Seated beside this strange woman in the gloom of the taxi, extreme shyness came over Jimsy Mackee. Shame moved him deeply, and fear. He had so nearly broken himself, and this girl had saved him so wonderfully. Was she interested in him, really? His vanity was refreshed. In the press of traffic at Jamaica Bridge he put out his hand to touch hers.

"Here, miss . . ." he said. "I'm awfu' sorry."

"Keep yer hair on, Jimsy," she laughed.

He looked up in her face, his blue eyes full of gratitude and admiration.

"Here . . . I'd feel an awfu' lot better," he stammered boyishly, "if ye'd gi'e me a kiss."

She turned on him sharply, but in his simple face she saw only the harmless humility of sentiment. She smiled. •

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## THE CENTRE FORWARD

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"A' right, wee man. Kiss awa'," she said quietly.

He kissed her reverently.

"By jings," said Jimsy warmly, "you're some Moll!"

A pause. Then more confidently :

"Doin' anything the night?"

"Dunno," said Bella.

"Like to come oot wi' me—a meat tea an' the pictures an' that?"

"Depends."

"On whit?"

"Whether ye win." She turned on him with a quick smile. "Look here, wee man, if ye score a goal this afternoon and yer team wins, I'll meet ye ootside O'Hara's at haulf-past six."

. . . . .

The story of that struggle for the Scottish Cup has been told time and again. In dim bar parlours middle-aged men are still ready to recount its fluctuations and illustrate its tactics by means of diagrams drawn in spilled beer by horny forefingers. Events are dated in the world of sport from that tremendous Final. Bookmakers still rub their hands over the memory of the great triumph of an outsider.

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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The Kelvin Rangers beat the Rovers by one goal to nothing, that goal brilliantly scored by Jimsy Mackee. Jimsy was the hero of the game, a marvel of efficient ubiquity. From the moment he came on to the field, bouncing on his short legs in the manner peculiar to footballers, it was clear that he was out to do his wonderful best. He did it. The cheer that saluted his goal was awful in its passionate triumph. A hundred thousand men in unison are terrible to hear. . . . Scotland was saluting her greatest centre forward. It took fifty-four constables of the Southern Division to save him from his friends at the close of the match.

But Jimsy, for all his elation, had no time for the handshaking. During a pause in the game—when one of the Rovers backs was recovering from a determined charge by Jimsy—he had seen Bella Macfadyen, crushed against the railing near the centre line, the smiling young man by her side. She had grinned and waved to him. . . .

His trainer was exasperated that he avoided an introduction to the members of the Selection Committee of the S.F.A. The chairman of his Directors had to take Jimsy's refusal to dine with him and the rest of the team that evening. And

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## THE CENTRE FORWARD

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Jimsey cut short the inevitable recapitulations of that afternoon's work and hurried off. At half-past six sharp he was waiting outside O'Hara's public-house.

At a quarter to seven he was still there, waiting. And at seven o'clock, and at a quarter past. . . .

For Bella had already collected forty pounds and, when Jimsey at last deserted his post, was sitting in the balcony of the Metropole Theatre beside the young man with the smile, gazing spellbound at the moving scenes of *East Lynne*.

## CHAPTER IV

### A RETURN TO NATURE

#### i

**M**RS CLANCY'S—third door to the left along the eastern gallery—was far and away the dirtiest house in Mince Collop Close, Cowcaddens. Mrs Clancy had been born in a dirty house—had, indeed, seen cleanliness only in prisons, from which she took away but a poor opinion of that quality; and so it was natural that such houses as she could call her own should be dirty. Especially when she grew old and fat, and poorer and poorer, was this state inevitable.

The floor of her single room, where it was not covered with pieces of stale food and grease and mud, was littered with the grey, verminous rags used by Mrs Clancy as her bed. The jaw-box, of which the waste-pipe was always choked, was foul with an accumulation of wet tea-leaves, egg-shells, sodden bread, potato peelings and grease. There were other ugly, dirty things in Mrs Clancy's house, but they are hardly mentionable. It was a horrible mixture of things, which combined to

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## *A RETURN TO NATURE*

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produce the nauseous odour that burdened the atmosphere in the apartment.

After a struggle that lasted for nearly thirty years, the sanitary authorities gave up Mrs Clancy as a bad job. She was incurable. But as it was their duty to keep Mince Collop Close reasonably clean, they decided on the eviction of her aged person from the community. She was old and helpless and poor—excellent excuses these for invoking the aid of Charity, and so avoiding the trouble of a prosecution.

Accordingly, a brisk woman of middle-age visited Mrs Clancy one day and went round the room saying, "Tut tut!" and "Dear me!" Then she turned on Mrs Clancy and told her that she was to be taken away out of that horrible place to a nice, clean, quiet home in the country.

Mrs Clancy protested. She swore and wept and prayed, invoking a large number of saints from the calendar of her faith. But the brisk woman did not even seem to hear. She only said "Nonsense!" once or twice, and told Mrs Clancy that somebody would call next day to take her away to a nice, clean, quiet home for aged people in Strathblane.

Mrs Clancy had no defence; but before the

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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evening was out she had spread among her neighbours a report of this threat to her liberty and privileges.

“Tak’ me to a hame !” she wailed. “Me that’s lived dacent and quiet in the Close a’ ma life ! ‘A dirty hoose,’ says she. ‘The clartier the cosier,’ says I, ‘thankin’ you for naethin’.’ It’s a sin, that’s whit it is.”

Most of the neighbours laughed, for slum-life favours the growth of fatalism. Her only sympathiser was Bella Macfadyen, Queen of the Fan-Tans. Mrs Clancy had helped the gang more than once in small matters affecting the disposal of stolen goods and the provision of liquor during unofficial hours, and the Queen was moved to sympathise.

“Never you mind, mither,” said Bella. “I’ll come oot an’ see ye.”

With that casual promise from a source so unreliable Mrs Clancy had to be content. Next day the brisk woman appeared at her door, handed her a shawl, told her to pick up her bundle, and come on. Thus ignominiously—a figure of tragedy, if there had been eyes to see it—Mrs Clancy left Mince Collop Close. But the neighbours were all up at a big fire in Port Dundas,

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## *A RETURN TO NATURE*

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and her going was in silence and neglect. Within a month Mince Collop Close had forgotten her.

### ii

One February night, just as the clocks were striking twelve, a man, walking alone through a dark street in the St Rollox district, was set upon by three rough lads. One of them seized him by the shoulders, another kicked his feet from beneath him, while the third bent down, as he lay on the ground, and spat in his face. Two girls stood by, laughing. They egged on their men to batter the life out of their victim. But it was only after taunting the prostrate man and rifling his pockets that the leader of the gang seized the unfortunate wayfarer by the hair and knocked his head against the pavement until he was insensible.

Before his wits forsook him, however, the man had recognised his assailants. When at last he rose with an aching head and found himself in a dark recess behind a tenement door, it was not long before he was making his way in the cold grey of dawn to Mince Collop Close. There he found Bella Macfadyen and told her how the Duck Street gang had attacked him and jeered at the Fan-Tans.



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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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Her anger flared up at once. It was not in her to endure calmly either a distant or a dangerous threat to her omnipotence in the cruel country in which she lived. That afternoon she waited with her people on a piece of waste ground near the road along which the Duck Street gang was likely to pass on its way to the football match at Firhill. She knew well that they would come. The attack of the night before was a challenge according to the convention of the underworld.

They arrived in numbers. Halting under the gable of a derelict building, the Duck Street gang gathered together, apparently oblivious to the presence of the Fan-Tans, who were grouped, some of them sitting, about a heap of bricks in the centre of the waste. Laughter came in coarse gusts from the gang by the building. They seemed to be enjoying a wild, satirical jest. Then they took to looking over their shoulders at the silent party by the brick heap. At last a girl among them spun round and threw a sharp taunt at the Fan-Tans. The preliminaries had been observed. From each group burly young men detached themselves and advanced, lowering their heads, towards each other. In a moment the air was filled with the curses and heavy breathing

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## *A RETURN TO NATURE*

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of fighting men and the shrill cries of excited women.

Bella Macfadyen remained behind, hidden from the roadway and the combatants by the mass of builder's lumber. Her interest was less in the scrimmage than in the road, along which the police might at any moment appear. She fervently desired that the Duck Street gang should be trounced without interference. Their last scrap—in Dobbie's Loan at midnight—had been interrupted, and the police were watching. . . .

A squeal from the midst of the scrimmage brought her sharply to her feet. Her henchman, Danny Gregg, was running towards her, while the rioters had given over their fighting to gather in a thick cluster and stare at something on the ground.

"Oot o' here! Quick! . . ." said Danny hoarsely.

Without question, she followed him across the rough ground, away from the group and behind the wall bounding the yard of the derelict works.

"Some fool's used a knife," he explained with a curse. "It's a polis job, sure."

They hurried together eastwards and plunged in among the steep, narrow streets of Dundashill.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"If it's a polis job," said Bella, breathing hard, "they'll come for me, anyhow."

"We'll see," said Danny grimly, hurrying on down-hill.

"I'm no' wantin' the nick the noo," she went on, "and I'm no' wantin' to rin awa'."

Danny gave her no answer. His only purpose was to get his Queen as far away from danger as quickly as possible. He stepped it out bravely, his face white and his jaw set. A short burst of Bella's rare laughter surprised him.

"I doot it's an alibi I'm needin', Danny," she was saying. "I think I'll awa' oot and see old Mither Clancy at Stra'blane."

"That's the ticket!" cried Danny, grinning at last.

They turned into the dark, archaic booking-hall of Queen Street station. She had less than ten minutes to wait for a train. Danny Gregg sauntered off to mix himself in the crowd that was boarding the green cars for the big match at Celtic Park.

### iii

Mrs Clancy's reception of Bella Macfadyen was rapturous. She wept fluently in the facile emotion of her age and kind.

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## *A RETURN TO NATURE*

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“ Dear knows, Bella,” she cried. “ Dear knows, but I’m gled to see a face from dirty auld Glesca.”

They walked in the grounds of the home, Mrs Clancy fat and hirpling, and almost unrecognisable with her clean face, the girl tall and straight and handsome, a figure of romance with a dome of bright hair over a tartan shawl. The old woman unburdened herself of grievances that were painfully real to her.

“ They pit ye in a bath twicet a week—Bella, a bath, wi’ saip an’ a’! An’ I’m in a room up there wi’ ten widden beds in it, till I’m fair perishin’ wi’ the cauld. An’ they mak’ ye chinge yer claes oncet a week! It’s juist like the jile. . . . An’ sich an’ a crowd o’ auld dodderers that’s here ye never seen. No’ a baur amang the lot o’ them. Prayers every nicht at seeven, an’ awa’ to yer bed at the haulf-’oor. Prayers—and Protestant trash at that! Oh, Bella, I wish to peace I wis back in ma ain wee room in the Close. This is juist the jile a’ower again. Whit hiv I done to be jiled like this . . . ”

They had passed down the garden path, in among the yew-trees that sheltered the old house from the main road. Bella had said little, giving

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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the self-pitiful garrulity of Mrs Clancy the chance of spending itself. But now she stopped and sought the old woman's eyes with a whimsical smile.

"D'ye think ye could sclim' that wa', mither?" she asked.

Mrs Clancy hesitated.

"Bella! Whit . . ."

"C'm on, auld wife," said Bella, taking her arm.

"Up wi' ye."

"Oh, Bella. . . ."

The fear of the chill discipline within was upon Mrs Clancy, but the girl was already forcing her to face the low parapet.

"C'm on, an' haud yer tongue," commanded the Queen of the Fan-Tans. "There's a train in ten minutes."

Long before she had recovered her wits, Mrs Clancy, panting heavily, hatless and dishevelled, was sitting in a third-class smoking compartment of a train bound for Queen Street, Glasgow.

With their approach to the city, Mrs Clancy's natural garrulity revived. Her fear and dislike of the country and her sentiment for the sloppy homeliness of Mince Collop Close came bubbling up in a welter of self-pity, defiance and shiftless

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## *A RETURN TO NATURE*

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egotism. Bella, her face sternly set, did not listen. Once she interrupted the diatribe sharply.

"Here, auld wife," she said imperatively. "If onybody asks you, ye can tell them I cam' oot to see ye wi' the ten o'clock train. See?"

"Guid kens it micht ha' been eicht in the mornin' for a' I could tell," Mrs Clancy replied. "Don't you fear, Bella. Ye've been a guid freen' to me this day, an' I'd sweer whit ye like to the Pope of Rome himsel'."

They passed through the archway into Mince Collop Close as the dusk was dissolving into darkness.

"Glory be to God!" cried Mrs Clancy, "but it's me that's gled to be back hame."

"Shut it!" said Bella sharply.

She had seen, standing in the shadow of the gallery, a man in a blue serge suit and a bowler hat of the shape affected by policemen in mufti. The ancient enemy was on her track already. The man stepped forward as they approached the stairs.

"Aye, Bella," he said sorrowfully. "Ye've been at it again, have you?"

"Whit's yer trouble noo, Mackay?" she asked.

"There ye go! There ye go!" complained the detective. "I suppose you'll say you know

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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nothing about this business between your folk and the Duck Street lot."

"Whit business?"

"Come on, now, Bella. I'll just have to lift you, and you know it . . ."

"Lift me!" cried Bella, indignant. "I've been oot in Stra'blane since ten this mornin'. Ask the auld wife here and see."

Mrs Clancy's eager voice broke in:

"That's the God's truth, Mackay," she prattled. "I wis juist takin' a wee walk doon the gairden yonder after ma breakfast, when, 'Losh me!' I says to mesel', 'if that's no Bella Macfadyen comin' up the road!' An', sure's daith, that's who it wis. Bella Macfadyen—an' she's been wi' me oot yonder a' the day, an' I'll swear that wi' ma haun' on the Holy Bible, mister, an' before a' the polis in Christendom. There ye are! The back o' ten o'clock it wis. I wis juist takin' a wee walk . . ."

Bella checked the recital with a glance. She hitched her shawl round her.

"There ye are, Mackay," she said, and made to pass on.

The detective stepped back.

"We'll see about that." But his confidence was shaken.

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## *A RETURN TO NATURE*

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“ See awa’, then,” said Bella cheerfully, moving off. “ C’m on, auld wife.”

The key of Bella Macfadyen’s house fitted the battered door on the left of the eastern gallery. They found that the sanitary authorities had been busy; the place smelled of carbolic, and the floor shone where it had been scraped. Mrs Clancy wept.

“ Losh me!” she cried. “ Luk whit they’ve din to ma bonny wee hoosel ” .

But the neighbours rallied round her. When Bella Macfadyen looked in during the evening, Mrs Clancy had almost restored her room to its former condition. A mush of food debris cluttered the sink, one-half of the floor space was covered with filthy blankets, a pot of jam had been upset near the door, several half-chewed crusts of bread lay on the mantelpiece, and by closing the window tight, Mrs Clancy had recreated the old familiar atmosphere of greasy warmth.

On the mantelpiece stood a half-empty bottle of methylated spirits, with which Mrs Clancy had been compensating herself for the hardships of the month just past.

“ Come awa’ in, Bella.” she cried hospitably.



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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“Come awa’ in and ha’e a wee taste oot the bottle.”

She hiccoughed loudly. She waved a dirty, unsteady hand to draw attention to the furnishing of her room.

“Isn’t it juist champion?” she demanded to know. “Anither day, an’ I’ll have it as snug as’ ever it wis. Juist like hame again.”

## CHAPTER V

### PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

#### i

**P**ETER THOMSON SIME was only sixteen when he set out to win the Cowcaddens for the Lord.

The phrase was his own. Peter had been reared in the atmosphere of Presbyterianism unrelieved. From the cradle he had been designed for the ministry, the hope of a dull household. John Sime, the father, was a foreman plumber; his wife, the daughter of a small builder; and Peter Thomson Sime was their only child. They lived in their religion, as Scots of the old school will—found in it their chief interest, their solace, and their amusement even. Conversation among them dealt mainly with the affairs of the Church, of the Molendinar Parish Church in particular. Outside that influence there was, they believed, nothing but sin. They were smugly conscious of being of the elect. They addressed their God on terms of easy familiarity, confident that He would be good to the faithful and satisfactorily

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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fierce in His judgments on those who did not believe. They talked of Him over the breakfast-table as of a venerated public official.

So when Peter Thomson Sime told his parents that he felt moved to win the Cowcaddens for the Lord, he was, at least, not guilty of affectation. It was the idiom of his caste; and the task was one he had been brought up to regard as highly suitable for a godly young man. His parents were delighted; indeed they were secretly relieved to hear him express his ecstatic desire. Peter had not progressed so well in the active life of religion as they had dearly hoped. They had saved and pinched and made the family life duller than it might have been to gather the wherewithal that would see their boy through the Arts course at the University. That was secure in the Savings Bank in Ingram Street. But Peter, at sixteen, had failed twice, to his great astonishment, in the Preliminary Examination. And now he was due to leave school and do something.

They accounted it a reward of righteousness that, at this stage, a voluntary assistant was required in the Mission supported in the Cowcaddens by the Church. Here was Peter's chance to work simultaneously\* for his ideal and for

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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admission to the Divinity Hall. So, hopefully, confidently, radiant in the blessing of his parents, Peter set out in the third month of his seventeenth year to save the people of the slums.

The Mission Hall was situated in Kyle Street, in the midst of a rich field for missionary endeavour. Shebeens and ticketed houses were round about it. Bookmakers and women of the streets polished the shutters over the curtained windows. The electric lights of a public-house on the opposite side of the street competed at night with the pallid incandescent mantles of faith. Loafers, drunkards, unskilled labourers, hooligans and aliens swarmed the alleys and closes about it. Within, the hall was grey and clean and cold. Along the far end ran a low platform, supporting a desk and a squat harmonium. On one side stood a counter, on which a large urn of tea, weak but hot, was usually simmering. On the other were tables, littered with periodicals and pamphlets of an improving nature. The body of the Hall was packed tight with bare wooden benches, and the walls were adorned with decorative texts.

Peter, confusing means and intention, thought it splendid. In the Mission, at all events, there

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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was always something for the enthusiast to do. Their formal services were frequent and regularly patronised by faded old women in black cloaks and bonnets. Then, every night, when they had gathered in a sufficiency of men, tipsy but ready to be entertained, and women, whom the luck of the streets had treated ill, they held an informal meeting for praise and prayer. Serving out hymn-books, pointing out the wall-texts to maudlin navvies, seeing the continuous ebb and flow of humanity's dregs out and in that battered door, Peter was happy. He believed implicitly that he was saving souls when he persuaded them to join in the hymns. *Bringing in the Sheaves* was his favourite of those they sang; it symbolised his work :

*"Bringing in the sheaves! Bringing in the sheaves!  
Yes, we'll come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves!"*

When the tune rose, flat and quavering, to the cracked ceiling, a lump came into Peter's throat.

Day in, day out, for months it went on, endless and yet ever-changing, till Peter reached his seventeenth birthday, then his eighteenth, then his nineteenth. . . . He never passed that

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## *PILGRIMS PROGRESS*

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Preliminary Examination. Twice again he tried; twice he failed. These failures affected him not at all. He was quite satisfied with his work and with himself. The Cowcaddens were to be saved for the Lord. It was his privilege as well as his duty to see to that.

During his third winter at Kyle Street the regular missionary, a bleak man of middle-age with a prominent Adam's apple, handed in his resignation, and was duly sped by the Molendinar Parish Church, with an illuminated address and a purse of sovereigns, into retirement. Peter was appointed his successor at a salary of £80 per annum. They had a pleasant little ceremony of installation in the hall, which was filled with dirty people, who took a grimly cheerful interest in the proceedings because they were giving tea and buns free, and famine stalked in the Cowcaddens. Then in the same winter, within two months of each other, his parents died. Their joint estate added £100 to the income of their boy. •And Peter Thomson Sime welcomed it as ammunition for the campaign of salvation to which he had dedicated himself.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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### ii

The death of his father and mother allowed him to gratify an old desire of his zealous soul and take rooms in the district he had elected to save for the Lord. Mrs M'Govern was the name of his landlady. The widow of a licensed broker, she had attended the Mission for years, helping with the tea, reasoning with tipsy women of the streets, and leading the hymns in a jaded but relentless soprano. A godly woman Peter knew her to be, and so described her frequently. Her house was not clean, but Peter did not notice that. He slept between the same sheets for three months on end, and did not notice. The texts on the walls of his room reassured him altogether. He required no more than a little food at fairly regular intervals and a roof to cover him at night. His essential life was all in the aspiring hymns that rose, blatant and futile, through the obscenities of the slums.

A year passed. The work went on. According to Peter's report to the Session of the Molendinar Parish Church, it prospered. He gave statistics relating to the cases dealt with and the number of new communicants. But he did not need these

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*PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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to convince him of the worth of his work. Even after five years of toil among a people to whom religion cannot, in the nature of things, mean anything, the dull self-satisfaction of his kind prevailed within him. It was only in the sixth year of his career at Kyle Street that life began to acquire complexity in the eyes of Peter Thomson Sime.

Late on a wet night of November he came in from an outdoor meeting in the Phoenix Recreation Grounds, a meeting with a gratifying sequel in the form of fourteen habitual penitents, and in the morning he waited in vain for his landlady to appear with the breakfast tray. At ten o'clock he was moved to call for her, and there was no answer. The kitchen was empty, the grate black, and the bed had not been slept in. He fried the kipper for himself, and at eleven answered the knock of a masterful tally-man, who very roughly demanded an overdue instalment of Mrs M'Govern's account. Peter paid it. At half-past eleven the factor's clerk appeared to demand the rent, likewise overdue. Peter paid that also. He began to comprehend the reason of Mrs M'Govern's disappearance, and found corroborative evidence in the shape of empty bottles beneath



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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the bed. But his simple belief that she would return was never satisfied. He was left with a house of his own.

He recovered from the personal shock of Mrs M'Govern's defection within a week. The claims of his work in the drab hall in Kyle Street were so numerous, the individual experience could not signify much. There was always something to do, and he was out early and back late, so that, in his occasional reflections on his own state, he was glad to have a house of his own. Home was something of which he had forgotten the meaning. To preach the Word, how, wherever, and when he could; to have Christ acknowledged by whatever sort of scallywag—enough for Peter in that. He was satisfied with himself, his work, and its results. He was saving the Cowcaddens for the Lord.

For another year the good work went on. The tide of human wreckage drifted into the Mission Hall—and out again. The ecstatic prayers rose regularly, the wailing hymns were sung again and again. And still the people came—and went. But Peter Thomson Sime ignored individuals. To him, self-satisfied, the rhythmic tide of folks in need of help was a flowing stream to be purified

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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in the filters of his faith. It would end one day, and then the appointed task would be done. He went on, and felt no call to search his soul.

Then, one hot night in June, there drifted into the Hall a girl, who wept bitterly through a prayer and two hymns. At the end of the service a worker took her to Peter, where he sat jotting a note on the evening's work. She was young and better nourished than most children of the slums, even pretty in her wild way, and she said her name was Lizzie Snell. Earnestly he asked for her story. She sobbed terribly while she told it.

It was one of which the general outline was familiar to Peter Thomson Sime. There were no parents to acknowledge her, and she had been on the streets, and a man had ill-treated her. The raw drama of it hurt him not at all. What he saw in Lizzie Snell was not the old squalid tragedy of industrialism. She was but a fallen woman, a brand to be plucked from the burning, material for his own insatiable ambition. So he spoke to her passionately of Christ and His love, and told her how salvation followed on repentance. She seemed to drink it in through her large infant's eyes. Then he gave her a shilling and told her to return the next evening.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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She came again, and again, and again. Every night she was there, and Peter felt her big eyes upon him. She sang fervently, prayed with her eyes screwed tight, and gave her testimony lavishly. After the services she would sit on alone, a forlorn, expectant figure, and always the sight of her sitting there drew Peter to her side. He talked to her of repentance unto life, of salvation, of love and faith. The big eyes dwelt on his face adoringly. And when he realised them there, he would halt in his discourse, while the blood rushed from his heart and pounded in his throat. A coil of golden hair curled over her pink ear, and the line of her white, firm neck swept down to the warm secrecy of her bosom.

Of the flesh. . . . Night after night Peter Thomson Sime struggled against the fierce seductiveness of her. His work, his mission, his duty: he tried to keep these before him, but the irresistible invitation of Lizzie Snell took him, trembling, across the Hall every night. Then the animal softness of her eyes brought the hot blood into his head, till the man in him could have crushed her in a fierce ecstasy of hateful desire. Every night she asked him if he knew of a kind

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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family that would take her in as a servant. She had no place to go to . . .

It was all settled by a law stronger than Peter Thomson Sime and his sense of duty. Away from her, he hated Lizzie Snell for the hateful thing she roused in him when they were together. But he could not keep away from her, and she would not keep away from him. One evening she contrived it that they should be left together in the Mission Hall when all the others were gone. A snuffling sound made him turn from his last task of piling up the soiled hymn-books to see that she was crying. He dropped an armful of books and ran to her.

“Lizzie, Lizzie . . .” he pleaded, defenceless in the presence of a woman weeping.

She lifted her wet, puckered face to his for a moment, then buried it in her arms again. His hand, trembling, went to her shoulder. The warmth, the softness of her. . . . A fire raced through his limbs. His hands moved to stroke the smooth skin of her neck and the lovely softness of her hair. And still she sobbed. A storm of tenderness overwhelmed him. He pulled her to her feet, and held her head close to him, soothing, protecting. Kind, foolish words came up from

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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his heart and spilled over his lips on to her suffering. She nestled closer to that generous strength, and his hungry lips sought hers and hung on them.

Outside roared the life of the Cowcaddens, waiting to be saved for the Lord.

iii

But no woman in the world could have stood for long between Peter Thomson Sime and his chosen task. Before a week was out he had rearranged the human facts of his life to square with his ideal. The marriage would help the work. A man needed a helpmate. He saw himself returning at night from the Mission, tired and eager for the domesticities, to a warm house suffused with the love and beauty of Lizzie Snell. She would give him strength, encouragement, consolation, applause. And he had given her salvation.

They were married in July. Their honeymoon at Rothesay coincided with the Glasgow Fair, and Peter was able to carry on the work among the crowds that thronged the esplanade. With the crowd and with a gladness they could never share, he went back to the city at the end of a

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## *PILGRIMS PROGRESS*

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fortnight. Lizzie Snell, too, professed herself eager to be at her housekeeping.

August passed. In September Peter was sent by the parent church to attend a three days' Conference on Home Missions in Newcastle. He came back to find that Lizzie Snell had given birth to a man-child, of whose paternity she could not give a clear account.

It stunned him, so that he could neither rage nor weep all that horrible day. He had never suspected anything like that. Of such matters he had only the missionary's cold, empirical knowledge. His own innocence astounded him as much as this too personal revelation of the world's wickedness. He had seen so much wickedness — but the folks concerned had only been cases. This was his own wife. All that day he sat alone in the mean parlour of their house and groped for hope through the cloud of evil Lizzie Snell had brought about him. He was at his place in the Mission in the evening, but his service was mechanical. Peter Thomson Sime wanted to get back to think it out. He cut short the tentative advances of an assistant conversationally inclined, and hurried home. In the cheerless parlour again he took up the arguments that were

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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hurtling backwards and forwards across his mind. It was too much. Weakness and emotion attacked his sanity. With a sob, he slid from the horsehair of his chair to the floor and there, on his knees, put it to his God in hot trembling petitions, wrestling the night through with his own carnal egotisms.

In the morning he told Lizzie Snell that she was forgiven, and that, together, they would bring up the boy in the fear of the Lord.

iv

So, in one night of anguish, Peter Thomson Sime made acquaintance with pity. The missionary became a man.

It was the presence of the baby in his house that brought him, so late in life, nearer to humanity. Peter had seen thousands of babies at close quarters—dirty babies, happy babies, diseased babies, solemn babies, dying babies, all sorts of babies—but those he had encountered in the Mission Hall had not touched his heart. For the smug, narrow soul that was in him then, they were merely babies, ciphers, symbols. But this fat, solemn one at home got through the guard of formalism that the blow of its birth had broken

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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down. Lizzie's baby touched him. With every glance at that enigmatic face he grew in wisdom and tolerance. Now he had a heart to feel pain and sympathy and love, feel as if in the quick flesh the festering wounds of this world's ugliness. Now he had tears instead of reproof and exhortation for the sins of poor folk. And he saw a new significance in the personality of that Christ for whom he would win the Cowcaddens.

It was not a swift process, a conversion overnight. But they noticed at once in Kyle Street that he was changing. From his eyes had gone the hard assurance of old, and now there dreamed in them a little tenderness, a little doubt. His addresses implied less business-like familiarity with a stern God and more sympathy with a Christ in pain. He would brood over the face of a swaddled baby, asleep in its mother's arms. Leery, dipsomaniac hags could depend on it now that the young man with the broad, sallow face would hear their sorry tales to the end, not exhort from them at once, harshly, promises of reformation. He seemed to understand better.

And as his understanding grew, so did his vision of the task he had set himself broaden. He saw in his dim way that salvation could only



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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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be a word to folks who had no happiness, no chance on earth. Insanitary, overcrowded houses; insufficient wages; the oppressiveness of the tally-man; the pub. with its facile promise of forgetfulness—such things were also among the works of Satan. In his simplicity he set out alone to defeat them as part of the task of saving the Cowcaddens for the Lord.

Carefully and earnestly, taking his wife into his innocent confidence one night, he calculated that he could spare out of his income thirty shillings every week.

It was his joy to spend the last penny of it on those who drifted in and out of the Mission Hall. Jenny Cassidy's baby had to have milk. The doctor had to be brought in to old Granny Gloag, and the comforts he ordered paid for. Young Joe Murrin, lead-worker, had to go to the Convalescent Home at Kilmun, and be provided with his fare and a few bits of clothing. Mrs Grant, of Lyon Street, was shivering for want of warm underclothing, and her imbecile daughter must have a pair of boots. The tally-man was pressing sorely on Janey Briggs, and Sarah Flynn was behind with the rent. . . . It went on, and on, and on, endlessly, yet Peter

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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Thomson Sime believed that an end would come eventually.

But he did not look too curiously for results. In truth, there were none beyond the maudlin gratitude of the women. Mrs Grant sold the underclothing and got drunk on the few shillings she raised. Her daughter's husband pawned the boots every Monday, redeemed them again on Saturday out of his wages, spent the balance on drink and coarse food over the week-end, and pawned them again at the beginning of another week. The consumptive Joe Murrin swindled him out of four shillings on the railway ticket. Janey Briggs, flushed with the assurance of the missionary's help, incurred a still heavier debt to the tally-man. When their guilt was too obvious to be overlooked, Peter Thomson Sime preached to them the doctrine of repentance; and they repented—till the next time. But he counted every repentance seriously as a triumph for the cause he preached.

Meanwhile Lizzie Snell stayed at home.

She had slipped out of his life again, for that flush of passion was forgotten, and he was back wholehearted in the life out of which her wild beauty had for a space beguiled him. She was

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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always there in the little house, making his meals and playing with her boy, so he did not pause to wonder if she was happy. He presumed simply that she ought to be. Always gentle with her and the child, he did not ask her to share his spiritual life. He had no time to think of the domesticities.

But Lizzie Snell was of a people in whom individualism is a quality highly developed. Peter Thomson Sime was forced to take notice of his wife more and more as the baby grew out of the need of the mother's constant care. She took to going out at nights alone, so that he would return from his work to find an empty house. He waited up patiently for her return—from the pictures, she said. Sometimes she asked him to take her there, and the innocence of his refusals only angered her. More frequent became her excursions, till he had to protest against the expense. She retorted hotly, pointing to the thirty shillings he spent each week on the poor. It hurt him terribly, the worse that she could not see the need for that. The argument degenerated into an exchange of hard, bitter personalities. And from that day on Lizzie Snell was to her husband a rebellious shrew with a nagging tongue.

He could forget that in his work. But one

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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night of December he came home to find, sitting by the fire with his wife, a tall woman with a clean, strong profile and a mass of burning hair. He could have cried out at the sight of Bella Macfadyen, Queen of the Fan-Tans—an Amazon of the criminal classes, a lost woman, a limb of Satan in his own house! He sat alone in the bedroom till she had gone.

Their quarrel that night was fierce. All her suppressed hunger for the liberty of the streets, all the selfish vulgarity of her guttersnipe's soul came out in Lizzie Snell's attack on the man who had saved her. She overwhelmed him with curses, threats, taunts and satire—ugly stuff expressed in ugly words. He could not meet her on her own ground, and he could not see that they could part.

Peter Thomson Sime accepted his burden. It did not hinder his effort to save the Cowcaddens for the Lord. Lizzie Snell went out at nights, he knew not where. Often he came back to find the Queen of the Fan-Tans in his own chair by the fire. The home was broken. But there was always his work, and in that he could forget.

He was busy at the time in the planning of a great Christmas Treat in the Mission Hall. He had dreamed of it for a long time—of white-spread

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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tables, scores of grateful people, hot meat and fragrant puddings, music, a prayer. The elders of the parent church had warmly approved, and a special collection had been taken. On Christmas Eve he came home to Lizzie Snell and her baby, bearing in his hand a canvas bag that chinked when he put it on the kitchen dresser. The joy of achievement was in him, and the simple need to share forced him to reach out to the woman for sympathy, and applause.

"One hundred half-crowns, Lizzie!" he cried. "Subscribed by the members of the Church! Every man and woman and child at the dinner to-morrow will get one! And here"—he took from his pocket an envelope—"twenty pound notes—to pay for the good things. All from the Church. May God grant His blessing on our work!"

She could not help smiling at his boyish enthusiasm. A tender memory of his old simplicity flickered across her mind. . . . He placed the money in a drawer and hurried out again—to discuss the details with the purveyor, he said.

Lizzie Snell was left alone with the money, and money had had a tremendous significance in her poor life. The tenderness of the moment just

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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past went from her. Thirty pounds there, in that drawer at the end of the dresser. You could do a lot with thirty pounds. . . . Lizzie Snell was young; she had knowledge of many strange things, but not of morality. The temptation to go to the drawer and feel all that wealth in her hands was a burning thing, to be checked only by physical fear. She went to the window and looked down on the street. There was a stir there, a tang of life that did not penetrate to her drab, decent kitchen. Shops down there with desirable things in the windows. She could hear the laughter of girls and the deep alluring voices of men. There was life out there. And life called to Lizzie Snell, who was without love to keep her at home. The baby . . . she paused. Then thirty pounds and her own young life. . . . She went to the drawer and took out the bag and the envelope, feeling through the coverings to the good, hard metal and the crisp paper inside. The door opened suddenly, and she turned to see Peter staring at her beneath a frown.

“Put these down!” he said sharply.

“I wis only lookin’ at them, Peter.”

“Put them down and shut the drawer!” he commanded.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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The old resentment flared up in her barbaric soul.

"Ach, you and yer money!" she shrilled. "Keep it, ye big, mean saftie. I'm gaun to hell oot o' this."

She whipped her shawl from the peg beside the dresser, wrapped it round her head and shoulders, and faced him. He stood in the doorway and pleaded with her. But the termagant of the slums was roused.

"Lemme oot, ye big Jessie!" she cried, and forced her way past him.

He sat down on a low chair before the fire, rested his head upon his hands, and wondered. An hour passed. The baby woke up, and he soothed it to sleep again, almost in tears over its helplessness—and his. She would come back, she must come back. . . .

But when Lizzie Snell came back it was with Bella Macfadyen, Queen of the Fan-Tans, and two sinister male attendants. He rose, protesting. A blow on the jaw knocked the senses out of Peter Thomson Sime. Lizzie Snell, his wedded wife, snatched the money from the drawer and handed it to Bella Macfadyen, once again her Queen. They hurried away.

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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"Ye can keep the wean," was Lizzie Snell's last word to Peter.

But Peter did not hear.

When he came out of unconsciousness the desolation of his outraged home was plain enough to see. The drawer in which the money had been kept hung open; a chair had been knocked over in the struggle, and its legs, stiff and horizontal, held his dazed mind for more than a minute. Robbed, despoiled, everything gone, means and love and hope. He thought immediately of the baby, and passed quickly to the other room to see if they had taken that from him as well. And when he saw that the infant had cried itself to sleep again, he knew that the crime of those others was worse than if the mother had taken her son. The anger of impotence seized and shook him. They were beyond hope, those people of the slums; and he hated the stupidity of their cruelty—those leering, buccaneering brutes! There came with his anger a passion to strike back, to hurt. He turned from the cradle and, hatless, ran from the house.

The people in the streets stared at him and laughed.

"Crivvens! Holy Joe's been on the batter!" they cried to each other with coarse delight.



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## MINCE·COLLOP CLOSE

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But he neither saw nor heard individuals or their voices. He was looking for the Queen of the Fan-Tans and his wife, wreckers of his faith. He passed twice up and down the Garscube Road, and halted only at the end of the second journey, when his eyes focused on the garish sign above the swing doors of the Glenbranter Vaults. Desperation urged him to a swift, foolish decision. For the first time in his life Peter Thomson Sime made his way into a public-house.

They were not there. While the rough men and strident women at the round bar laughed at him, Peter questioned a barman feverishly. They were not there; they had not been there that evening. He made for the door again. As he lurched out through the swing-door, raised and desperate, he found himself face to face with the Reverend Mr Gavin Brown, Minister of the Molendinar Parish Church, and his two senior elders. The little group froze into chill immobility in the midst of that crawling world of rough people.

“Ah!” said the minister at last, dryly.

He had come with his elders to see Peter and to learn how the preparations for the Christmas dinner were proceeding. And here was the

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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missionary, hatless, with a bruised forehead, staggering from a public-house.

"Mr Sime . . ." the minister began again. But Peter, aware in his desperation of the fatal, final quality of this encounter, could not wait for the chill sentences of inevitable dismissal. He stepped close to the clergyman and cried his bewildered bitterness into that scared face.

"Don't talk to me! Useless. . . . Everything! Useless and a mockery! No hope here! On and on and on, and it gets worse. Christianity!" His bitter laughter skirled above the noises of the street. "Mockery! mockery! Go back out of here with your prayers and your hymns, and pray God to blot the Cowcaddens off the face of the earth! Back, you old fools! Back . . ."

He waved his arms wildly. The storm passed, and the calm of resignation came back to him.

"That's all," he said simply.

Peter Thomson Sime turned and walked away.

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They dismissed him incontinent, disgraced him almost publicly.

But he had still his life to live out to the bitter end. So much of it had he given to a cause, he

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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could not turn from that cause now. It was himself, his brain and body—everything. If he could not live it in the Mission, he would live it alone in the Cowcaddens, which he had set out to win for the Lord, which were still to be won for the Lord. He turned to his task again. . . .

The people said bluntly that he was daft after the catastrophe. He lived alone, in the same old house, and brought up Lizzie Snell's boy. He went on sharing his substance with the poor, who laughed at him for the most part and spent his gifts in drink. His successor at the Mission watched his strange activities, and reported them to the Kirk Session, of which the members shook their heads at the news and exchanged platitudes about lamentable falls from grace. The Cowcaddens policemen knew him and the boy by headmark and took the kindly, patronising interest of their kind in him. "Daft Sime and his wean," indeed, were for the Garscube Road in those latter days what its idiot is to the village.

The years passed. People forgot the history of Daft Sime and accepted his presence in the communal life without question, and with only the hurried sympathies of cities. The poor were always there, fighting and cheating for meat and

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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drink; the Cowcaddens were still to be won for the Lord. Peter Thomson Sime's interest in that task was evident to the world only in the shy way he would hang on the verges of crowds that gathered round the Socialist orators, preaching economic salvation. Lizzie Snell's boy went about with him always, growing from month to month.

Then a hard winter fell upon the Cowcaddens, a winter of unemployment and wet, bitter days. Missions and Charity Organisation Societies brought up ladies in furs from the West End to serve out soup and distribute clothing. The police and the strenuous workers of the Salvation Army picked up starving men and women from the gutters of side-alleys, whence they had gone to die, and found babies fumbling at stone-cold breasts. Famine with her attendant, crime, stalked in the narrow streets, and Society came in its strength in a desperate, belated effort to save itself from the implicit threat to its comfort.

But of the hundreds who worked in the slums that winter of terror, none spared himself less than Peter Thomson Sime. He joined no organisation; he worked alone; but he gave everything he had of vigour and substance. They did not laugh

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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at him now, the poor, but stretched out skinny claws for his charity and forgot in the urgency of their hunger to say even a word of thanks. They took everything, and he gave everything, till he was white and pinched about the face himself, and Lizzie Snell's boy, growing, too, often went hungry. He spoke to nobody, and nobody spoke to him. There was no need to talk now. One could only give, and give, and give again in desperation. ,

Late on a Saturday night in January Peter Thomson Sime was making his way home from a round of calls on the most sorely afflicted among those he knew. By his side, whimpering with cold and hunger, trotted the boy. They did not speak—they had neither of them the strength for that; and an easterly wind, driving the sleet in their faces, paralysed the muscles of their cheeks and jaws. Peter was aware that he had fallen sick. His mouth was dry, his temples throbbed, and he was very weary. He went on only in the faith that he could spare himself and the boy a cup of hot cocoa on their return to the house. He stumbled sometimes. Now and again he stopped altogether, holding to the wall and seeking to brush away from before his eyes the coloured

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## *PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*

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clouds that kept passing before them. From one of these spasms he was aroused by sounds of snivelling that came from a doorway near at hand. There, on the steps, he found an old man on the point of collapse. The ancient stirred at the touch of a hand on his shoulder and turned a blue face up to the light of a street lamp.

"It's cold," the old man shivered — "bloody cold. Oh! . . ."

Peter took off his overcoat and threw it about the bent shoulders of the wretch on the steps.

"Put that on," he said, and passed along.

The easterly wind was unbearable in its bitterness now. He gasped, then discovered that he had a cough, short and dry—something deep down, that would not come up. He coughed and coughed and held to the railings. The effort was terrible. At last the boy saw him relax his grip of the railings and sink to the ground with a groan of weariness.

It was two policemen who came searching for what the whimpering of the boy might indicate. The beams of their electric torches shone on the prostrate figure of Peter Thomson Sime.

"Another of them," said the younger constable briefly, while his mate turned the body over;

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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then, as the hard light caught the haggard face:  
“ Lord! But it’s Daft Sime.”

Peter opened his eyes and blinked in the glare. Then a fatuous smile came over his ghastly features.

“ I have saved the Cowcaddens for the Lord! ” he whispered ecstatically — “ For the Lord! Hallelujah! ”

Then the smile died, while the mouth remained agape.

“ This bloke’s for Gartnavel,” said the young policeman.

Gartnavel is the institution in which the Glasgow folks place those who suffer from delusions.

## CHAPTER VI

### WOMAN TO WOMAN

#### i

**T**HE single-apartment house shared by Bella Macfadyen and her Auntie Aggie was licensed by the sanitary authorities, and ticketed accordingly, to accommodate  $4\frac{1}{2}$  adults. That it sheltered but the two of them was the choice of the Queen of the Fan-Tans. It was not one of those convenient rooms with a large bed built into the wall in the Scots fashion. A dresser and a deal table occupied precious space. They slept on the floor. But it was not the fear of overcrowding that irked Bella and moved her to abuse her aunt when that sociable woman spoke of taking in lodgers. Hers was a spirit and hers a life that demanded complete freedom of action.

But the Queen of the Fan-Tans was not so strong that she could withstand the scourge of poverty, which fell cruelly upon the Cowcaddens one terrible winter. The luck of the gang was out that year. They were of a people that does



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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not save the smallest tithe of what money it handles. Bella fought hard for her independence, but in vain. Hunger tames the fiercest pride. Into the house there came at length an Irish navvy and his young wife.

It was all joy for Mrs Cassidy. The lodgers were amiable and talkative over the fire of an evening, and they paid regularly. When Bernard Macginty had gone to his work on the railway in the morning, and Bella had slipped out on her own dark affairs, Bridgie was then agog for conversation. She shared Mrs Cassidy's weakness for strong tea and imbibed with it, girlishly, Mrs Cassidy's mature views on life. They were both of the weaker sort that expands in company.

But between this Bridgie and Bella there could be no sympathy. The Irishwoman had to burn under the cold indifference of this dangerous, beautiful creature, who turned the weapon in the wound by treating her talkative, emotional husband with a tolerant irony that passed over his peasant head. In each of the three women the close contacts of life in the single-apartment house roused all the hot passions of egotism. And yet they had to bear with it. Peacefully they lay down together at night, Bridgie Macginty between

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## *WOMAN TO WOMAN*

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her husband and Mrs Cassidy, with Bella next to the dresser.

It was a hard winter. February was a month of bitter cold. Towards the end of it Mrs Cassidy fell ill. A wee bit of a cold, she said it was, and, beyond drinking rather more strong tea than usual, treated it lightly. But she was a puffy creature, and good food had been scarce for months past. Soon she was unable to rise from the dirty blankets on the floor. Bridgie Macginty nursed her as well as she could. Then, in fever, Mrs Cassidy took to muttering strange, inconsequent things; her skin dried up, and a short, hacking cough racked her continually. In one of these fits, supported by Bridgie's arms, she collapsed like a bullock under the hammer, her fat chin falling forward on her breast. A weak heart could do no more.

Grimly they faced the ghoulish amenities of the chamber of death. Every night, until the cheap funeral took place, Bella and Bernard Macginty lifted the floppy, cold thing that had been Mrs Cassidy out of the way on to the dresser, and in the morning laid it again on the floor, where it lay through the day under their own bedclothes. The Parish had to pay for the burial,

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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and the Parish was in a hurry to get it over. They had only two days and nights of that ghastly communion to suffer.

Then, with a strange uneasiness upon them all, they returned to the house from the bleak, hurried ceremony in Sighthill. The ghost of Mrs Cassidy was with them. Even Bernard Macginty had a glimmering then of how much upon the mature influence of Mrs Cassidy the comfort of their life in the single room had depended. They sat over the fire and spoke little. But there was tenseness between Bella and Bridgie, facing each other across the person of Bernard. The Irishwoman hated and feared the flamboyant girl who was to share their bed on the floor; and Bella felt that passionate jealousy, hated it, and despised her in whom it was burning. It was in her mind to go out and walk the streets till she could find diversion, but her cruel hunger for triumph kept her there, hurting the other woman, holding her down, angry and helpless. She did rise once, however, to trim the wick of the lamp, and Macginty blundered in on the sensitiveness of the women.

"You are right, Bella," he said, stretching his arms to yawn: "it's 'time we were lying down

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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to sleep. It's the ould lady we'll be missing this night."

A loud, bitter laugh escaped Bella, then she covered her concern in a pretence of shaking out the bedclothes. Bridgie, too, turned to the task, while Bernard, easy in his complacence, stood by the fire and unbuttoned his waistcoat. . . . A quick flash of anger at his obtuseness drove Bella to face the problem squarely.

"Youse two'll lie doon there," she said, pointing to the heap of blankets in the centre of the floor; and added lightly: "I'll doss it oot by the dresser."

It was an arrangement that served them well enough for a time. Bella was free by day, and the clash at night could be avoided. But the germs of disease that were breeding in that ill-aired room seized upon her and brought her, indignant but helpless, to bed. All day she had to endure the company of Bridgie Macginty and her huffy attentions. In the evening she had to lie and listen to the Celtic garrulities of Bernard.

She had two reasons for listening to his talk with interest. It hurt the other woman to see their friendship ripen, and this stupid peasant from Connemara had much to say that Bella's lawless

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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instincts followed greedily. Macginty revealed himself cautiously at first; then, encouraged, his peasant vanity catching fire, stood forward as a sentimental fanatic for Ireland. He had the bright, burning eyes, the high cheek-bones, the lantern jaws, and the thin, cruel lips of the breed. His were the eloquent hands and the native trick of ornamental, passionate speech, on the heady metaphors of which he could build up an ecstasy of lawless, patriotic vision. Night after night, while Bridgie endured the pangs of a double jealousy, he outlined to the Queen of the Fan-Tans the ideals and the plans of militant Sinn Fein. Shortly he was hinting at dark activities in preparation near at hand, in Glasgow.

Bella was no politician. Life in Mince Collop Close had made her an individualist. But she was deeply interested, if not in the passion, then in the plans of her lodger. She was quick to see that the adventure and the rewards she wanted for herself might be in these wild schemes.

Through her convalescence she toyed with the patriotic fervours of Bernard Macginty. Deftly and cynically she let it dawn upon him that young Ireland could find a score of strong recruits among

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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the Fan-Tans, and the apostolic zeal of her lodger soon took fire.

“ I’ll take yez round to the Boss! ” he cried one night. “ There’s plenty work for them that’s willing. ” He regarded Bella for a time through his fervent eyes, and added piously: “ Another dahter for Dark Rosaleen! Up Dublin! ”

He did not catch the smouldering look in the eyes of his Bridgie; but Bella did, and laughed shortly and with contempt.

### ii

It was for Bella a suspiciously respectable quarter to which she was led by Bernard Macginty to meet the Boss. From Renfield Street they took three-halfpenny tickets on a green car, and were whirled out to an eastern suburb of tall new tenement buildings and broad streets. Each window had its neat casement curtains of cream or buff linen, bright children played at the close-mouths, and the little shops of fruiterers and confectioners had a brisk, trim air. In one brought up in a place of convenient shadows and handy dark doorways, the open boulevards and candid fronts of the house induced the sensations of nakedness. She was glad to follow Macginty up a tiled close and

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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three flights of stairs. On the painted glass of a flimsy door her escort knocked three times. Without a word, a young woman of dark complexion held open the door for them to enter, and passed them at once into a large, untidy room, where, at a table littered with papers, sat a man writing.

If his environment was painfully suburban, the personality of the Boss reassured her. Here was the born conspirator against law and order she knew so well; somewhat more finely finished than those of her own kind, but of the same embittered passion. His name, Seumas de Rossa, and a soft hat of mouldy black velour—which he retained in her presence—were his only Irish features. His nose, his keen eyes, his pliable hands, his quick, soft voice, and his quickness of mind were those of the Jew. It was plain that he loved his rôle of organiser of sedition. He received them darkly. He sent his voice across the deal table to Bella with the authentic accent of the professional enemy of Society.

“Bernard, my comrade, has spoken of you,” he whispered. “You are for the Cause? You will work? For Ireland . . .”

Bella laughed curtly.

“Come aff it, mister,” she said.

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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The Jew, however, was conscientious.

"But you are against them?" — he waved an arm—"Government—police—all the bloody tyrants?"

"If there's anything ye want done, I'll help ye. See? Cut oot the fancy stuff."

De Rossa was not accustomed to the curtness of the Scot. To Bella he appeared slightly ridiculous, and the Jew in him saw it quickly enough—saw that the woman meant business. He leaned across the table and made himself explicit.

High explosives were what he wanted. Headquarters in Dublin were crying out for supplies of material to hasten the withdrawal of the Saxon invader. It was pointed out by Dublin that there are a large number of coal-mines in the neighbourhood of Glasgow. . . . There, then, was the idea. The magazine of the Merse Colliery, near Uddingston, was known to contain considerable quantities of gelignite at that time. In ordinary circumstances, local patriots could have been organised to secure it, but the little affair of the drilling on Dechmont Hill had roused the police to watch every movement of every Irishman in the district. The Cause had to enlist and pay for help from outside. There would be



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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employment for the Queen of the Fan-Tans and three lusty men.

Mr de Rossa paused and smiled tentatively.

"Whit are ye peyin'?" asked Bella at once abruptly.

"Five pounds each," answered de Rossa as curtly. "And Dublin pays for the gelignite. Add a share of that. . . . We pay on the nail. What about it?"

"Right y'are," agreed Bella, and rose. De Rossa did not rise to see her out, but turned at once to the papers before him on the deal table.

To his wife that evening, in the presence of Bella, Bernard Macginty held forth lavishly. Never had Dark Rosaleen, he declared, adopted such a daughter. With Bella by his side he, Bernard Macginty, would be proud to fight twenty peelers, and them armed to the teeth.

"Isn't she the girl entirely?" he demanded of poor Bridgie. He did not heed her nervous silence; he did not see the jealous droop at the corners of her mouth.

"I'll be steppin' across the road to warn Patrick O'Mara," he concluded, and left the women together.

Bridgie and Bella faced each other across the

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## *WOMAN TO WOMAN*

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single apartment of the house that was too small to hold them both. There was a cool, ironical smile on the face of the Queen of the Fan-Tans. Heavy with child, Bridgie hated that smile, and felt she must go mad if this other woman was to lead her man away from her into danger. She rose and gripped the edge of the mantelpiece with fierce fingers.

"Ye'll leave him alone!" she hissed at Bella. "He's mine, d'ye hear, mine! Touch him and I'll tear the eyes out of your dirty head."

Bella studied the hot, red face with a calm that was too cruelly scornful.

"You!" she said, deliberately curt.

Yet she thought again of leaving her lodgers alone in the house until the affair at Uddingston should put her in funds once more. The flashes of Bridgie Macginty's jealousy were maddening in their triviality. But Bernard's plans came between her and that freedom. He stopped her one night in the archway of Mince Collop Close and told her it was his duty to go from home at once. There were plans to be made in Uddingston, and the police were known to be suspicious. He ended on the emotional note:

"The dear girl's near her time, you know,"

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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he pleaded, "and it's the better of a fine, up-standing girl like yourself by her bedside she'll be. It'll be no place for a man at all, at all, who's got to be doing his duty by the dear land."

Her instinct was to swear insolently at him and his wife and his schoolboy's romanticism. But as she looked into his serious face her mind jumped to think of the woman and her burden—the foolish face, the blind, helpless hands of a baby, the travail of women—while men played with whimsies! Of a sudden she found herself on the side of Bridgie, who would so soon and so sorely need a woman's help. The Queen of the Fan-Tans said she would stay.

It was with delight that Bernard Macginty told his plans to Bridgie. When Bridgie wept, a frown deepened on his forehead. When she begged and prayed that he should stay, he grew cold and hard. When she flung herself at his feet and clasped his knees and shrieked, he was white with anger at her selfish folly.

"Get up out of there, ye slut, or will I have to put ye into your bed!" he cried. Roughly he unclasped her hands and threw her backwards away from him. "There's big work to be done,

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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d'ye hear, that neither wife nor woman can stop. Up Dublin! "

And he stalked from the room, leaving Bridgie to face the desolation that women fear most. Bella's anger flashed up. To be held to this by the despicable image of the baby!

It was going to be awkward, too. It might affect her plans. The baby was coming soon, within the week. But she held her tongue, and, characteristically, made up her mind to see it through. With perfect restraint she said nothing while Bridgie wept, or abused her, or flashed the darts of her jealousy, or in extremities cursed the child that was to come and hoped it would die. She treated Bridgie firmly. It occupied a good deal of her time to keep the fretful woman in bed. Then one day, while Bridgie slept, she made her way to the Maternity Hospital.

That evening two young men in neat tweed suits penetrated the rank mysteries of Mince Collop Close and entered the presence of Bridgie Macginty. Bella had explained them as "two young toffs comin' oot for doctors," and Bridgie was one of their earliest victims. They were self-conscious; they sniggered a great deal; and their youth offended the peasant modesty of Bridgie.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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Bella endured their frivolity for a minute, then intervened with decision:

"Do youse two want yer heids knocked thegither?" she asked.

The young men were serious of a sudden. The elder asked some questions and appeared to calculate. Finally he said that they would return on the Friday evening.

Again Bella cursed the day that brought Bernard Macginty and his wife into the house. Friday was the day set aside for the affair at Uddingston. She would be there. Her barbaric soul hungered for the adventure, and her need cried out for the five pounds she would earn. If it came to the choice, Bridgie would be left to suffer alone. Bella had no softness of that kind. But she had a fierce passion for efficiency, and she could not bear to risk a weakening wave of compassion for Bridgie alone with her trouble. She kept to the house while the days passed and bore with the fretfulness of the sick woman. She could not help herself. Bridgie's plight touched something deep. The Queen of the Fan-Tans wondered at her own softness.

At four o'clock on the Friday afternoon Bridgie began to suffer. At half-past four Bella

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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was to meet three young men of her following outside a certain shop in Dobbie's Loan, and she meant to keep her appointment. She took her shawl from the hook behind the door and draped it over her blazing hair. She was very conscious of the bright, suffering eyes of Bridgie upon her—questioning, apprehensive eyes, like those of a bird.

"Are you for leaving me, then?" came Bridgie's pitiful question.

"Keep yer hair on," said Bella brusquely. "I'm awa' to the Maternity."

She returned within twenty minutes, the two students at her heels. They had been on their way to Mince Collop Close when Bella met them in Renfrew Street.

"Come on, youse two," she had ordered. "She's wantin' ye."

And here they were, the elder carrying an encouraging black bag. They were very serious now, and asked careful questions about kettles, basins, and what not. Bella was reassured. She crossed to the bed and spoke to Bridgie.

"I'll awa' noo," she said.

The tears came into Bridgie's brown eyes.

"And here's me left to die," she sobbed.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Left to die without husband or friend. Mary Mother be merciful! Left to die——"

"Devil the die!" said Bella shortly.

She turned away, but her skirts were caught by a feverishly strong hand.

"If you let him be kil't . . ." cried Bridgie.

"For the love of Mary, let him come back to me! Oh, send him back to me——"

"Come aff it!" said Bella.

She left the room hurriedly. She was angry and scornful, hating the bright, fevered, longing eyes of the Irishwoman. She had more to do that night than carry the memory of them about with her. But it was almost impossible to shake off that memory. Women and babies. . . . It troubled her all the way on the car to Uddingston.

iii

Half-past ten rang across the grey fields from a church steeple when Bella and her men stopped at a gate in a high-hedged lane about a mile from Uddingston station. It was a fine May evening. The sky in the West was still faintly flushed with the glow of sunset, and over the dreary fields on this edge of the Black Country a pale light still flickered. Here and there in the dusk stood up

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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the naked, skeleton structures built over the pit-shafts, contending against the few trees and the dusty hedges for the mastery of this portion of Scotland. If they had not yet triumphed, the blight of industrialism was on this stricken country irreparably. The scents of vegetation came to the nostrils tainted with chemical fumes. Over the sparse flowers was a sprinkling of coal-dust. There was the smoke of many chimneys between the earth and the faint summer stars.

At the gate they had to wait some minutes in the curious silence of that bastard countryside, until a man came down the road from the South. He halted thirty yards from where they stood.

"Is it Cork?" came his voice mysteriously.

"Cork it is, Macginty," answered Bella.

The patriot came forward, radiant. "A great night for Ireland this," he said. "To hell with the dirty English!"

"Shut yer mooth and let's get started," Bella broke in coldly.

But they had to wait till four others joined them. They arrived together—a pale, silent youth with long hair; a burly Scots miner, their guide to the colliery; a tall, stooping Englishman with a broken nose, introduced as a locksmith;



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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and a red-faced man with the look of prosperity, addressed deferentially by Macginty as Mr Joyce. He replied to their greetings in the accent of Cork. But few words were exchanged amongst the ill-assorted members of the party. At a word from Joyce they set off irregularly across the dark fields towards the tallest and widest group of buildings in sight. Bella was uneasy. She liked to have her mind clear as to the plan of any campaign. And Macginty had no plan as yet, only his own large enthusiasm.

"It's for Ireland, darling, and Heaven is on the side of them that fights for the right," he declared with warmth.

"I've seen Heaven on the side of the polis, whiles," answered Bella dryly.

It took them twenty minutes, so warily did they go, to cross the fields to the railway track leading to the mine. They might have marched with song and flying banners, for any sign there was of life on that dismal plain. Perhaps a wearied stoker at the furnace fires might have heard them and wondered dimly whose marriage was in train. The shabby emptiness of that world was its most terrifying quality.

They halted in the shadow of a row of empty

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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wagons to discuss a plan of action. From this point the guide, with Joyce and the man with the broken nose, was to go forward towards the magazine and reconnoitre. If no loiterer was about, a whistled rendering of the first bars of *The Soldiers' Song* was to summon them to the task of carrying off the packets of gelignite for the glory of Ireland and the destruction of her enemies. Should a loyal furnaceman and the watchman attempt to intervene, a shout was to bring the Fan-Tans up to deal with them. In a dark whisper, and with lavish blessings, Bernard Macginty ran over the details of the scheme. The three crept away.

"Let the rest of us be hiding ourselves in this empty truck," he suggested.

The truck was black and stuffy with coal-dust, but it made a perfect hiding-place. In its darkness they sat on their hams, as the miners do, and waited for the whistle. Macginty crouched by the sliding doors, a heavy, black revolver in his nervous hand. They could hear each other breathe. Now and again there came the rustle of a foot shuffling for comfort among the litter on the floor. There was nothing to do but wait.

Bella Macfadyen was conscious of no excitement.

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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She crouched there and dispassionately studied the pale, working face of Macginty, the patriot. Swiftly her mind took up a train of thought. She was conscious of a lump in her throat. . . .

The eyes of Bridgie Macginty, hungry, lonely eyes! Bridgie was in pain. Even now the poor soul would be going through it, what every woman goes through for a love that is so poorly returned. Her eyes took in again the figure of Bernard, forgetting everything in his sentimental ecstasy. Bella could have kicked him, tortured him into remembering the burden of women.

She leaned over to whisper fiercely in his ear:

“Bridgie’s havin’ her wean the night.”

He did not even look at her to reply.

“It’ll be another strong man for ould Ireland,” he returned passionately. “But wheesht! Listen for the whistle.”

She clenched her fists and itched to bash them into that rapt face of his. It was suddenly, brightly clear to her that Bridgie’s was a finer adventure than this childish farce of patriotic felony.

A quick movement on the part of Macginty interrupted the angry flow of her thoughts. He caught her wrist with his left hand.

“Listen!” he whispered.

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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The man was shaking with nerves. She freed her arm and leaned forward to look out. What was it? Footsteps—more than one man. They were not approaching from the direction of the mine-buildings, but from the North, the way they themselves had come. She peered through the gloaming. About a hundred yards away a solitary arc-lamp on a high standard was blazing coldly above a railway tool-shed. She saw three men move into the circle of pale light it threw on the ground—tall men, with flat uniform caps and short coats. She drew back quickly.

“The cops!” she whispered.

“Holy Mary! Betrayed!” cursed Macginty. He put out his head cautiously to look. They heard the click as he drew back the hammer of his revolver on the hair-spring. “There’ll be some black Saxon blood shed this night.”

Bella started. It was murder, and murder meant hanging for them all. Bridgie and her baby. . . .

Her mind worked in flashes. Her three men would do what she did; the nondescript boy was in a panic of fear already. Stealthily she slipped the shawl from her head and fidgeted into position to act. Her left hand shot out and seized

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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Macginty's right wrist, her right pressed the dull folds of her heavy shawl in his face. The revolver fell to the floor, but only with a dull knock on wood blanketed by an inch of coal-dust. Bella did not hear it. She was intent on gagging back the Irishman's curses. While her henchmen held him down with strong, relentless hands, she rammed the cloth into his mouth, wound the tails round his head, and then held herself rigid.

The footsteps passed. The policemen had heard nothing. They were intent on reaching the magazine. Now they were creeping towards the mine-buildings.

Inside the wagon they waited. Minutes passed. At length the silence was shattered by the tearing screech of a police whistle.

"Come on," whispered Bella.

They slipped out of the truck, Macginty helpless in the grip of two burly men, and, led by Bella, swift and clear-headed, made across the dark fields towards the East.

An hour passed before the gag was removed from Bernard Macginty's mouth. When they examined him in the light of a street lamp near

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## WOMAN TO WOMAN

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Shettleston, he was pale, his eyes dark and fierce. He said little, and that he hissed in the scornful face of Bella Macfadyen:

"Do you know how we do with traitors in Ireland?"

"No," said Bella shortly. "And I'm no' carin'!"

Then they went on their long, slow way to Glasgow in silence. It was full daylight when Bella and Macginty turned in at last under the archway to Mince Collop Close. Bernard stopped and faced her.

"I've been thinking," he said sullenly.

"High time," Bella agreed.

"It was my life you saved," he went on.

"I'm wonderin' if it wis worth savin'."

His eyes lit up. He smiled. His invincible egotism rose buoyantly within him.

"There's them upstairs that will bless you," he declared, with a glint of the old rapture.

"Shut it," said Bella.

But Macginty had recovered his tone. He took her hands in his.

"Was it for myself alone, darling, you saved me?" he asked, with all the gravity of his vast conceit.

She shook him off. The Queen of the Fan-

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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Tans appeared in royal anger. Her foot stamped on the cobbles.

“ You! ” she cried. “ You! You could go to hell for all I care! ”

He stepped back, dazed by the attack. Her face softened a little. She waved a hand towards the stairs.

“ It wis her I wis thinkin’ aboot, an’ it’s high time you were daein’ the same.”

Macginty began to move slowly towards the house. But again he stopped and spoke to her:

“ Are you not for having a look at Bridgie’s baby ? ”

“ To pot wi’ yer baby! I’m fine where I am,” said Bella, perjuring her immortal soul.

## CHAPTER VII

### FROM THE LONE SHIELING

#### i

CARISTIONA was unhappy in the city. She had been unhappy ever since the gable of the croft-house of Cairnvickoye was lost round the shoulder of Creag Bhan, and it draped in mist. The steamer did not frighten her, for three of the sailors were Caray lads, with homely island tongues in their heads. She was more alarmed by the first milestone she ever saw in her life — on the road between Tarbert West and Tarbert — and past it she walked warily. Then Tarbert itself: there were surely more people in this throng town of slated roofs than in all the Isles; and Tarbert is only a village to those of the city. No wonder that Caristiona was unhappy when she came out of the noisy, unfamiliar train into the city of a million souls. She had never dreamed that the broad world held so many men and women.

There was no interest for her in this great place. She feared even to look into the windows



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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of the shops, thinking it to be a joy for which she would have to pay; and in her purse were only seven shillings. Seven shillings is wealth for a lass in Caray, but Caristiona knew somehow that it was but a trifle to those white-faced folks who hurried past her or stopped to laugh loudly and without fear. Yet she was glad to give it all to the man who drove her in a closed carriage to the house where she was to enter service. He said he could do it at that price only for a bonnie lassie. She thought there was great kindness in the heart of that man.

If her new mistress had worn the short-gown of island housewives, Caristiona might have loved her, so beautiful was she, and so fair and soft her skin. But the lady wore a gown of silk, such as the girl had thought to adorn princesses only, and she was afraid—not that the lady might be a haughty, cold one, but that she herself, with her clumsy island ways, could never please her. The room they gave her under the roof was a palace to Caristiona, but its splendour was spoiled for her when she found that she must share it with a girl who had a coarse tongue and talked only of men and their rough ways. There were four girls in this great mansion. Two of them

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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were loose in thought and speech, and a third was old and crabbed, so that Caristiona had a sore heart for longing for the simple ways and tales of her sisters when they gathered round the peats in Caray. They made cruel fun of her, and frightened her with their filthy stories; and the poor girl could never tell her sorrows to the great lady in silks, who, since the night of her coming, had not found a word of praise or blame or kindness to say to her.

On the third night, Caristiona wrote to her old mother in the croft of Cairnvickoye. They were lies she wrote, for she dared not tell the cruel truth to yon old, soft-hearted one. And she cried when a rough man spoke to her while she was at the posting of the letter in a side street. The fright he put on her kept her indoors at first on the night when she should have been free, but the wild tongues of the other girls drove her out at last to risk the dangers of the crowded, unknown streets.

She walked quickly through the crowds, again not daring to halt for a peep into the lighted windows of the shops. She must have walked for hours, up and down and across the city, till her feet were sore. At last she stopped to rest,

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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a lonely figure on the kerb. Foolish boys spoke lightly to her, but she kept her eyes on the traffic at the crossing and found much to wonder at in the skill and coolness of the policeman who, with a wave of the hand, moved on or stopped the river of vehicles. He was a fine, strong man, she thought, just such as they breed in the Islands—and then she saw another. This last crossed the road to speak with the first. She heard what they said; and was she not the happy one to hear the old language of her race?

Him she had admired came towards her on his way home, as it seemed; she could not keep back the warm Gaelic words that came to her mouth. The policeman had white teeth behind his smiling lips.

“And you have the Gaelic!” he cried.

“I have that,” replied Caristiona. “I am of the Islands—of Caray.”

“God! Do you tell me!” said her new friend. “I know it well. I am of Benray myself.”

And nothing would do but that she should come away with him to his house, where his wife would have a bite of supper ready for the eating. His name was Duncan Macneil.

Caristiona forgot all her fears in the new

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*FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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interest of this encounter. She found that Duncan's wife was a Skye woman, who had come, like herself, from the Isles to service in a great house. They had a warm kitchen and a fine, happy baby in the bed of it. They gave her a Highland welcome and told her of the wonders of the city. What a telling that was—of the fine shops where both rich and poor could get bargains to suit their purses; of the lighted theatres; of the gaiety of the streets; of the kindness of the poor to the poor; of the thousands of Highlanders, men and women, that would always be meeting to sing and dance or just talk in the old language; of the cheeriness of the city, that is warmer to the heart of youth than the lonely, slow ways of the island folks. It turned the head on her, did this brave talk.

Duncan took her home in safety to the big house; and when the rough girls had coarse words for her ears, it was not a blush but a sharp retort that came to the lips of Caristiona. Then she sat down to tell in a letter to her old mother all the fine things she had seen and heard.

When the old woman in Cairnvickoye heard the words read to her, she dreamed of the story-telling they would have when Caristiona should

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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come back to Caray for a day or more in summer. But she did not know that she had seen the last of her girl, who had joined the thousands of those who will never look upon the Isles again.

ii

In the house of Duncan Macneil, within the next few months, Caristiona met many people, whose talk and whose company built round her again the sense of security that seemed to have left her for ever when she stepped from the train to the platform of the Central Station. She found that this great world of the city was but a collection of little worlds, each as comfortable and cosy as that she had left behind in Caray, each made up of men and women with just the same hopes and fears and passions as those of her own island folks. If there was a difference, it was in the easier gaiety of these townspeople and their greater readiness to buy their pleasures. And these were pleasures—the theatre, the tea-shop, and the concert—that delighted and excited Caristiona by their strangeness.

It was a young man, John Bain, who became in time the companion of her free evenings and her entertainer. He was an old friend of the

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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Macneils, a barber to trade, and the jolliest soul of those who met week by week in that hospitable kitchen. From the first, Caristiona was impressed by his easy, merry manners and his glib familiarity with the ways of city life. His trade had given him a taste for elegant dress and put a veneer of polish over his rough Glasgow speech, so that he was physically a marvel in Caristiona's innocent eyes. The openly admiring audience she gave him attracted John Bain in turn, to the dark, comely girl from the Islands. Soon they were acknowledged lovers, the butt of friendly jests by Duncan Macneil and his wife and friends.

So Caristiona's letters home grew fewer and shorter, and less and less frank. All her simple girl's interest was in John Bain and the city he knew so well. His attentions were regular and generous. He took her to the Zoo in the New City Road, to the pit of the Theatre Royal, to Hengler's Circus, to the Art Galleries one Sunday afternoon, to concerts in the City Hall, and—a grand occasion—a *Conversazione and Dance of the Mull Natives* in the Waterloo Rooms. On every one of her nights out, which coincided with his weekly half-holiday, they had high tea together in some lighted restaurant. It was only

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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on Sunday evenings now that they paid a duty visit to the Macneils. And soon they had exhausted the pleasures of the city, and took to walking at night up and down the dusky paths of the West End Park, reaching out to each other through the romantic twilight of spring evenings. One night, on a seat by the Kelvin, the man clasped her to him and pressed his lips to hers.

Caristiona was so happy after that, that she did not dare to think, lest she should awaken from a wonderful dream. Habit kept her writing soulless letters to the old mother in Caray; she blinded herself to ignore the cry for the old loving simplicity that sobbed through those from home. She would gladly have spoken of her happiness in her letters, but some dumb instinct, like a sense of guilt, checked the first impulse to do so, and with every postponement the confession became more difficult. Soon her new life was irreparably divided from the old by this thick barrier of concealment.

In the first summer of her life in Glasgow Caristiona was brought to the final test. The house in which she served was to be closed throughout July, and her mistress had no need of her in the small villa at the Coast. She was

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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offered a holiday at home: her fare to Caray would be paid. The offer raised a surge of homesickness within her, but John Bain took her that evening to the park and made love to her. The mother in Caray heard nothing of the chance. Caristiona took Mrs Macneil's spare room for the month.

She gave herself over completely to the hot excitements of her love for John Bain. Every night now they could be together, and she wished that she could add every hour of the day to their time together. He was so wonderful to her, so strong, so knowledgeable, so kind. Her peasant simplicity stood between her and a clear view of John Bain, the sophisticated son of the city, just as that quality was her strongest protection against his intimate advances. All that she had heard from the other maids in the big house of men and their dealings with women did not apply for her to her lover. Her passion was a pure exaltation of her emotional Highland soul, and the close, perfervid embraces of the man she adored brought her thrills which she rejoiced in with perfect innocence. She was more surprised than hurt when her friend, Mrs Macneil, shook a matronly head over the plan that Caristiona and John Bain



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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should spend a long day together at Rothesay during the Fair.

She was not to be checked by the misgivings of maturity. The train and the boat were packed to suffocation with the rough, slovenly, good-humoured crowds of Glasgow on holiday, but she was happy. Jaded women protected weeping children from tipsy fathers, but Caristiona saw nothing of the tragedy of the poor; her soul was John Bain's, who knew his way so well about these affairs. A German band played a tawdry waltz execrably; infants, glutted with sweetmeats, were sick in a chop off Toward; they were jammed against a paddle-box by the crowd. It was all wonderful to Caristiona. So also in Rothesay where, with the sheep-like herd of stupid holiday-makers, they drifted along the esplanade, listened to the pierrots, gaped into shop windows, and had their photographs taken — sitting together on a canvas moon—in a booth on the front. John Bain was there, masterfully jovial: Caristiona was happy. And after a meal in a dark eating-house in a back street, John Bain bought her sweets and fruit, and they climbed up out of the town to the roads that run among the fields and woods of Bute. Into one of these upland meadows,

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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through a five-barred gate, they passed arm-in-arm, and there, in the lee of a haystack, lay down together on the soft, sweet grass of the aftermath.

They stirred from their embraces now and then to eat a little and talk simply, and anon gave themselves over to their happiness once more. But when they were moved at last to look about them, to take their eyes from each other's face, they knew that it was late, and they had lost themselves in happiness perhaps too long. The still, golden light of evening was over the landscape now, and, sitting up, they felt that the sun had lost its warmth. Self-consciously and in nervous haste they hurried down the road through the huddled town to the pier. The clock in the tower above the harbour had stopped, but a badge-porter in a white coat, seeming to enjoy the grimness of his announcement, told them that the last boat had gone.

They faced each other blankly. The maiden timidity of Caristiona was roused then to let her feel hotly the shame and delicacy of their situation. But John Bain's easy worldliness rose to the occasion. He threw back his handsome, curly head and laughed. They would have to sleep in the Skeoch woods, as thousands of stranded

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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holiday-makers had done before them. Her eyes on the ground, her cheeks flushing, Caristiona hesitated. Then timidly she asked if he could not find her a room—or one for himself, for she could walk about all night. He laughed again and told her that his money was done. He put his arm round her waist and drew her to him: his deep voice spoke in the tone she could not resist:

“Come on, Chrissie, me and you’ll keep each other warm.”

His breath was on her cheek, and his nearness overwhelmed her senses. The wave of her passion took her close to him to whisper:

“Come on, then, Jock.”

They walked backwards and forwards along the front till the slow gloaming of the North shaded off at last into the glamorous blue of a summer night. Eleven o’clock was striking from the steeples when they started up one of the paths through the wood. It was dark in there, but he pressed her close against his strong body as they climbed, murmuring sweet foolishness in her ear. Beneath a clump of hazels they found a place where they might lie down together. His rain-proof coat covered them as they lay, her head in

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## FROM THE LONE SHIELING

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the crook of his arm. The stars sparkled above the dark masses of the trees.

Bird-song wakened Caristiona in the hour after dawn. Her first consciousness was of the cold; she was shivering. Her eyes opened, to see only the gnarled root of a hazel and the friable brown soil beneath it. She sat up very suddenly. She was alone. The rainproof coat was gone from about her. Her gaudy hat lay on the dewy grass beside her.

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### iii

She was dismissed from her situation early in the New Year. Her mistress, making an occasion of it, took a high, dignified line, regretted that she could not in the circumstances give her a character, but drew attention to her own generosity, by describing the difficulty to which her husband, a lawyer, had been put to gain for Caristiona an admission to the Maternity Hospital. Mrs Dodge-Campbell was not successful in concealing her contempt for the girl beneath the cloak of generosity. But that mattered not at all to Caristiona, who was numb under the load of shame and terror and loneliness she had to bear.

They tried hard to take the boy from her

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### *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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after he was born one May morning early. It was kindly meant; but she fought the proposal fiercely. He was all she had now. Her letters home had ceased long ago, and her pride would not let her take the love offered in those that came, pleading and pathetic, from the old mother in Cairnvickoye. The same pride, mingled with a hatred of association, kept her away from the Macneils. The boy—Hamish, she had him christened, after her favourite brother—was her own, the only dear thing left to her. To him she felt she owed a great recompense for the folly of his begetting. He must not suffer for his mother's wickedness, and only she could make sure that he would not suffer so. Quite earnestly, in her great simplicity, she set out on a new life.

Before she left the hospital a charitable organisation had found a job for her as cleaner in a block of offices in Hope Street. The wage was miserable, but she took a room in Mince Collop Close and left the baby with a kindly neighbour when, in the morning and the evening, she had to go to work. Soon she was able to find work to occupy her through the day. The Corporation Day Nursery in the Garscube Road took care of Hamish then, while she washed

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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tenement stairs or took an occasional spell at the wash-tub for the busy mother of a large family. Her employers gave her food and old clothes in addition to the poor fees of her craft. She was a strong woman. The welfare of Hamish was so far secure.

She did not see as much of the boy as her passionate love for him desired. He was always asleep when she returned in the evening to take him over, well washed and fed, from the cheerful staff of the Day Nursery. She had him only for these hours of sleep, and it was not enough for her to have him to hold to her breast warmly, and to soothe him with miraculous patience and tenderness when he wakened, fretful, in the night. Yet all this dreary life of hers was for him, to keep him well, to protect him against the contagion of evil, to give him a chance. There are less happy, because less purposeful, lives.

She resented the day when he had to go to school. He was passing out of her care, among influences she feared and hated by virtue of her own cruel experience. The wickedness of the city was a vast and terrible reality for Caristiona. Over the personality of the boy she brooded much. She saw with dull fear that he had the thick

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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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underlip of his father and the dark, wary eyes that had seduced her. So she imposed her maternal influence on him all the more, bathing him in her own soft, sentimental simplicity. That influence prevailed above all others. He preferred to be with her to playing in the streets. He shrank and ran from the ruder boys of Mince Collop Close. He was petted by the women teachers in the school. With his mother he had an almost feminine communion. During the long summer holidays he stayed close to the house, moving out only to buy the meagre materials of their housekeeping or to walk with Caristiona, his hand in hers, out the New City Road towards the park.

Good reports of his progress at school came to Caristiona regularly. The greatest day of all was a Sunday, when Miss Smith, a pinched little woman in the late thirties, picked her dainty way across the courtyard of Mince Collop Close and conveyed to Caristiona the official opinion of the headmaster that Hamish, a boy of distinct promise, should be sent on to the Higher Grade after the qualifying stage and not withdrawn, like most elementary scholars in the Cowcaddens, to earn a wage at the earliest possible moment.

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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Miss Smith talked largely and professionally of the Leaving Certificate and the University.

A vision came to Caristiona. She questioned Miss Smith carefully, and learned for the first time of the Carnegie benefit for indigent Scots students. What had been a wild dream became a possibility. She almost started from her chair. Hamish a minister of the Church! Here was the grand climax of her ambitions, the comforting disposal of all her apprehensions. The ministry was glorious, and it was safe. Dimly, Caristiona felt that this crowning of her boy's career would be an expiation of her own maternal sin.

He yielded naturally to her influence. His softness let him see how hard his mother had to work to keep him in the better clothes necessary at the Higher Grade School, and to pay for his books. He had all the gratitude of a girl. The storms of puberty passed over him while he stuck to his lessons, under the lamp in winter or by the window in summer. He played no games; his only relaxation was the Sunday walk with his mother. He took his Lower Certificate just when he was turned fifteen. The Higher was his exactly a year later.

Caristiona took a day off to attend the prize-



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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giving at the school. She was proud—so proud that she would not disgrace him by showing her dingy, middle-aged person in public as that of the mother of the Dux boy. She took a seat well back and at the side of the hall, where, through a blur of tears, she watched him march up the aisle towards the dais. There was pain for her in that glimpse. Hamish was so like his father—that heavy underlip, those dark, roving eyes, the hint of a careless slouch. Then she heard the headmaster's eulogy, and forgot the past, and wept plentifully again.

Her fear passed. Hamish was going to the University in October. Within four years he would be a minister—safe. Caristiona felt with a warm surge of joy that the journey was near an end.

iv

When, however, the proud excitements of the prize-giving day faded out, Caristiona saw that her boy must pass through a restless and difficult period before the University year was due to begin in the middle of October. He was a man now almost, and she could not dare to treat him as she had done the schoolboy, keeping him to

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*FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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herself. He was due a holiday from his books, while she herself must work all the harder, now that his expenses threatened to increase. There was no question of moving out of the dangerous environment of Mince Collop Close. She watched him anxiously.

July passed quietly. Hamish went off with a company of the Boys' Brigade to a holiday camp in Bute and enjoyed himself. He wrote to his mother twice a week; and when he returned, she was proud and glad to see the colour the sun had given to his skin, and the sparkle of fitness in his eyes. Only two months more, thought Caristiona. And he looked so strong and clean and reliable. . . .

But Hamish was not altogether the healthy, happy boy he appeared. The fevers, shames, ardours, ideals and self-contempts of adolescence were upon him, and he was restless. An urge he did not understand moved him to go out and look for something he could not define; the inhibitions of his rearing checked and confused his impulses; he was often in misery. Life was showing him wild, dangerous beauties of which an exclusively feminine upbringing had not allowed him to suspect the existence. It was all

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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very alarming and alluring. At the camp in Bute there had been one curiously exciting experience, when he and a friend had followed two pig-tailed girls three miles round the shore road past Craigmore, cornered them in a lane, and, with blushes and giggles, carried on a meaningless conversation for slightly less than three minutes, until the girls, red of face and shaken with maidenly cachinnation, had turned and fled. The boys boasted of this conquest on their return to camp. Their statement produced in the tent a solemn and sophisticated discussion about women. It rambled on long after midnight, until the orderly officer intervened. Hamish flushed before an alarmingly magnificent discovery. He dreamed hotly.

It was self-defence that moved him, during those August days, to get away from the city and people—to get away from girls and the hot confusions they set up in his mind. He would take the northern roads out of the town, achieve the safe and lonely moorlands, and lie about there, brooding, until he was certain that his mother would be at home on his return. It was only thus he could get anything like peace from his own impulses. Every contact with strangers was painful. It took a strong effort on his part every

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## FROM THE LONE SHIELING

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morning to take himself past the slovenly group of loungers that continually hung about under the archway of Mince Collop Close. Their jeers were almost comforting, because they were unfriendly. It would have been much more terrible if these unscrupulous neighbours had invited his acquaintance and drawn him into the dangerous circle of their society.

But one morning, as he hastened to clear out for a solitary ramble about the woods of Cadder, he saw before him, standing in the arch alone, a young woman. She was tall and handsome, and her hair was fiery and beautiful. Hamish's heart knocked uncomfortably, for this, he knew, was that brazen woman of whom his mother had often spoken in tones of horror, Bella Macfadyen, leader of a band of rough men and rude women. He quickened his pace. But he saw that she was looking at him curiously, and that she was about to speak.

"Hullo, young fella'," she said quietly.

"Hullo," answered Hamish falteringly. He made to pass on, but she put out a hand.

"Whit's yer hurry?" she asked. "Can ye no' speak to a body?"

He was at her mercy. Confusion, curiosity and

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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alarmed excitement held him fast. Interested, but yet as if from a superior eminence, she began to ask questions of him, and these he answered. Then he began to volunteer information and opinions, and she listened to them. Hamish was flattered. He was surprised and delighted to find himself capable of sustaining a conversation with a grown-up, exciting woman. He remained under the archway for an hour. During that time several strange young men and women drifted up, nodded to him casually, and took part in the talk, and Hamish thrilled with each encounter to find social intercourse so easy. The talk of these people adumbrated a wide and interesting sort of life. They seemed to take it for granted that he knew all its vicissitudes and pleasures. It was a heady experience for a mother's boy. When at last he tore himself away and reached the solitudes of Cadder, his day-dreams were not tinged with the melancholy trepidation of adolescence; already he was seeing himself as a successful actor on a coloured, exciting stage of experience.

On the following morning, as he passed out of the Close on his daily excursion, the archway was empty, and a great burden seemed to have been lifted from his spirit. Out on the country

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## FROM THE LONE SHIELING

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roads, however, that sense of relief gave place suddenly to sensations of regret and disappointment—as if something vaguely splendid had been missed. The day after, a complex of emotions kept him in the house till he saw from the window that a group of young men and women had collected in the entrance to the Close. Then, in a state of exalted trepidation, he went out. They let him pass, but some of the men nodded, while one, at least, mumbled a greeting. Again that day the mind of the boy was fired by indistinct but vivid dreams.

It only needed a definite chance to make him rush from his loneliness into the whirl of whatever sort of life was first put in his way. And within a fortnight Bella Macfadyen had set him on fire with a tempestuous proposal. She stopped him in the archway one evening as he was returning home.

“Here, you!” she hailed him, vigorously imperative. “Daein’ onything on Se’erday?”

He blushed and shook his head.

“Well, see here,” continued Bella. “We’re makin’ up a brake-club to go to Motherwell wi’ the Celtic. Comin’?”

Hamish was painfully at a loss. He knew he

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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must refuse, that the money could not be got, but his vanity before the woman sapped his courage.

"I'd like to, fine," he said.

"Right ye are," said Bella. "It'll cost ye three-and-six. We're leavin' George's Cross at haulf-past-wan. Mind you an' be there."

It was a miserable evening for Hamish. Pride had committed him to a desperate adventure, of which his mother would tearfully disapprove, and yet from her he would have to ask the money. He postponed the painful moment till his mother had risen to wind up her alarm-clock, the signal in that house that the day was done. At his faltering words she turned sharply, the clock in her hand, her face white.

"Five shillings!" she cried. "What nonsense is this?"

The challenge in her tone produced the inevitable result in the sullen, troubled mind of the boy. He lost control of himself. All the repressed resistance to his mother's discipline came spewing up in anger that seemed like hatred. Tears came, and he shouted through them. There was fierce defiance in it all. He would go with the Fan-Tans if he wanted.

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*FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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"You keep me here," he sobbed. "You give me nothing. You keep it all to yourself. You're a selfish pig!"

The attack dazed her. Still holding the noisy clock in her hand, she stared at this red, distorted face of the creature it seemed she had never understood. Mechanically her arm went up to replace the clock on the mantelpiece. The act of settling it in its place brought her thoughts into something approaching order.

"Go to bed, Hamish," she said quietly, and left him.

The Friday followed, and all that day Hamish wandered about the streets, brooding on his own case. Anger against his mother burned in his mind, then was succeeded by waves of pity and love. He knew she was right, that he was wrong; only there was that right of his to live. He could not conquer that egotism. In the evening he might have been appeased by an appeal from Caristiona. Only her emotion could have touched him. But anger was working in her also, and she had to control herself into dignified silence. Their exchanges that night were painfully formal.

On the Saturday morning she laid two half-crowns on the table.



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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“There you are, Hamish,” she said.

She had planned it carefully that she would keep her temper, leaving the rest to his common sense—and to luck. But her maternal jealousy goaded her into a fatal comment.

“If you must be a fool, you must.”

It stung him, and the opportunity passed. At one o'clock he stamped out of the house to join the rough party of football enthusiasts.

Caristiona had to wait up long beyond her usual hour for the return of her boy. At length, after the quarter before midnight had rung from the steeples, she heard a noisy group clatter through the archway into the Close. The skirling, foolish voices of girls offended the night, and the rude guffaws and cat-calls of young men sounded clear in the silence of the hour. The party stood outside in the courtyard, chattering foolishly, for a long time. Then at last came the sounds of parting. Caristiona heard the footsteps of her son approach, hammering on the concrete floor of the gallery.

She nearly cried out at the sight of him. His face was pale, and it looked moist. A lock of dark hair had fallen over his forehead. His heavy lower lip was hanging stupidly. Her son! Or was it

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. *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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his father, John Bain, come to life? She rose, her face, drawn with fear and suffering, raised blankly to his.

"I'm drunk," came her son's voice fatuously.

He smiled weakly and swayed at the door. She fought with herself to meet the occasion.

"Go to bed, Hamish," she managed to say.

"Yes," he said vaguely. "Bed. . . ."

It was left until the morning. Hamish slept heavily and wakened with a headache. It was Caristiona who roused him with a cup of tea she had risen early to make, after a night of sleepless anguish.

"Drink this, son," she said quietly.

His eyes sought forgiveness from hers.

"Oh, mother . . ." he cried.

"That's right, son," she soothed him. "That's right."

She could be nearly happy again. He was repentant, and her claim on him was re-established. She pretended to go about her work singing, while he rose dizzily, washed and dressed. Then his remorse poured on her wounded heart the balm she needed. She bent over him, murmuring, and stroked his dark hair, while, on his knees on the floor, Hamish sobbed in her lap.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Yes, son," she whispered softly. "That's all by with now. We will forget it, you and I, and you will go to the college soon and work hard, and be a credit to your old mother. And when you are a minister, laddie, I hope you will be getting a kirk out in the Islands yonder, where your own folk are. There's kindness and cleanness there, Hamish, you will never find in the cities."

"Oh yes, yes, mother," he cried. "I promise I will work hard. I'll get a church in the Islands and take you home some day. I promise, mother, I'll be a good boy."

And they wept together again.

v

A great integrity of purpose was brought by Hamish to his studies during that first year at the University. The Celt in him loved the proud, spectacular reality of being an alumnus of an ancient institution, a worshipper at that vast, preposterous Gothic shrine on Gilmorehill. The newness of learning flattered a boy's vanity. And it was part of his weakness of character that he should react violently away from the degradations of that difficult summer.

It was not long, however, before custom staled

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• *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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his callow pleasure in the status of undergraduate. The romance of scholarship does not compensate for its drudgery; the jumbled pile of Victorian Gothic on the hill above the Kelvin has nothing of association or beauty to grip the heart. It was hard work, stale work—long hours in crowded, drab class-rooms and weary nights of study in the lamplight of the slums. He had to wrestle so much with the waywardness of the thoughts that came between his eyes and the pages of Kautzsch. The memory of that solitary adventure of his in the public-houses of Motherwell came back to him often, alarming but yet alluring. There was in him, he had to realise, a tremendous impulse towards waywardness. He thought of his mother and her inveterate industry, and wondered. Of course he blamed himself, and determined to suppress his impulses rigorously.

Yet he compromised without knowing it. He deluded himself into reasoning that it was his duty to join the Union, knowing well at the core of his consciousness that he could not afford it, and that even its mild amenities might seduce him. It left him untouched for several months, largely because, even in that home of democratic learning, most of the men belonged to another

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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caste and deliberately ignored him. And that was a loud challenge to his vanity. It moved him in time to ask his mother for extra money to appear at a dinner celebrating the visit of delegates from the sister University of Aberdeen. He was conspicuous in the gathering for lack of an evening dress-suit, but a neighbour at table, flaunting the prosperity of a profiteer father, embraced him in his largess and plied him with drink. Hamish was not drunk when the meeting broke up, but his mind was flushed, and he saw life as a vivid, fine affair. He had been elected in the meantime, through the spacious generosity of an intoxicated host, to full membership of the Queer Club.

This was an institution with the vaguest rules and ideals. It met in a city tea-room once a week, talked 'Varsity shop with solemnity and with much noise, then set out on expeditions round the town—to picture houses, music-halls, dance palaces, and some less reputable haunts. Sober, Hamish knew that he must withdraw. But he was flattered by the companionship of social superiors, and the promise of illicit excitement was too glowing to be turned down. And he had no courage. He conjured up a phantasy to take the place of the uncomfortable truth that he

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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simply could not afford to share the expeditions of the Queer Club.

It was then he took to lying to his mother. His first tale was that he had a new class in the evening; then that he had less work to do at nights. Caristiona would search his dark, evasive eyes, then look away quickly, stabbed by the redolent sight of the heavy, sullen underlip. But she could condone much, and she knew nothing of the quality of University life. When he came home late one night and she smelled whisky on his breath, she accepted eventually his story that the Professor of Logic had taken him into his house and offered him entertainment, which he had not dared to refuse. When he asked for money, on an indecent variety of pretexts, he got it; and Caristiona worked an extra hour at night.

The Queer Club went on its silly way. More often than not its expeditions did no more harm than keep a dozen undergraduates from their work. There was more pretence than reality in their doggishness. They counted it a triumph of devilment to make such a noise in the fauteuils of the Alhambra that an attendant came to tap them on the shoulder, and they held that the

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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club had justified its name when Brewster, Hamish's host at the fatal dinner, knocked over a table of tea-things in the lounge of the Picture House. It was all very boyish and silly and pretentious. But, one night, a round of the bars in the theatre quarter had a sequel that, in their sober moments, even the most swashbuckling members of the Queer Club could not have contemplated without horror. One of their number—his identity was never discovered—threw from the stalls of the Empire an empty beer bottle. It crashed through the expensive glittering apparatus with which Mr Hugo Carl, illusionist, was illustrating his skill. . . .

Such was the end of the Queer Club. The affair was hushed up. It cost Brewster's father £250 and a lot of worry and delicate negotiation. And Brewster, senior, had not made large war-profits without possessing a keen sense of values. He insisted that his son's companions in the escapade should pay their share, £22, 10s. each. Hamish was handed a note to that effect at the door of Professor Hanna's class-room. . . .

It put him in a panic. The sum was beyond him. He could never approach his mother with this second confession of his weakness. And he

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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would be shown up among his fellows for the poverty-stricken keelie he was. That his vanity could not bear. He took a car that night to Dumbreck, rang the bell of a vulgarly red, expensive villa, and asked to see Mr Brewster, senior.

He threw himself on the mercy of that hard citizen. Beyond pretences now, he blurted out his foolish story, begged for mercy, wept. . . . Mr Brewster was not impressed.

"It'll be a lesson to ye, ma lad," he said heavily. "I'll give ye six month to pay. There ye are: that's a hanged sight more than ye deserve. Six month—and no more."

This was desperate. Hamish lost control and plunged deeper in folly. He could have taken Brewster's six months and trusted to a softening of the rich man's view; but he was a coward and an egotist. He sought out Bella Macfadyen, Queen of the Fan-Tans, got from her the address of a bookmaker, and went on, week after week, trying desperately to make money by forecasting—half-a-crown at a time and at long odds—the issues of League football matches. Once he made thirty shillings by this method. It encouraged him greatly.



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## *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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The Queen of the Fan-Tans was the agent between him and Noah Maurenstein, the Water Street bookie. She thought little of the business; to her it was naturally habitual. One day, however, Hamish came to her, white and drawn about the face, his eyes shifty, with a request that she should invest for him five shillings on the prospects of Romany Rye in the Grand National. She looked at him shrewdly.

"Are ye needin' money, young fella'?" she asked, deliberately abrupt.

"I should just think so," he answered passionately, his heavy face flushing.

Bella's cold smile flickered for a moment about her lips.

"Mebbe I could pit ye in the way of it," she said casually, looking down at her fingers. "If ye're on for it, meet me an' Danny Gregg here at the back o' seeven on Tuesday."

. . . . .  
Caristiona waited up for him that Tuesday night. With pain and anxiety she had observed the malaise that had been on her boy for some weeks past: challenged that evening as to his purpose in going out again, he had growled something incoherent and flounced out, banging

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*FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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the door behind him. She was dreadfully uneasy. It was so much worse that she had to suspect her own son, her Hamish, for whom she had given everything. From the steeples the hours and the quarters rang inexorably till it was almost midnight. And still he did not return.

Memory took her back over these twenty years. Hamish had been such a splendid mother's boy. She remembered little tendernesses, a score of occasions on which he had cried for her help and protection. He was hers, surely, altogether hers. Life had no right to take him from her; he had no right to leave her. She knew what was best for him, she alone, and now he was trying to make his way without her, knowing nothing of the cruelty of cities. Boys would be boys, of course. . . . But Hamish was different. She could bear no slight to her authority over him. She made up her mind to speak to him when he came back, to settle it once and for all. And ah! the soft fairness of his hair when he was a baby. She had a lock of it wrapped in tissue paper in the box under her bed. . . .

The sound of heavy footsteps broke through her dreaming. A heavy hand rapped on the door.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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She opened it, to see the gigantic form of a sergeant of police standing there.

"Come in," she managed to say.

He removed his helmet and ducked his head to avoid the low lintel, and as the light of the lamp caught his face she recognised who it was.

"Duncan Macneil!" she cried.

"Just that, Caristiona," came the heavy, kind voice of old. "It's a while since I saw you last."

They faced each other across the deal table on which he had laid his helmet.

"I doubt I've got bad news for you, Caristiona," said Duncan at length.

She stared at him. Her left arm went behind her to feel blindly for the back of her chair. She let herself sink into it.

"Yes," she whispered.

"I was on duty at the desk in the Northern," the thick voice went on. "They brought in a lad at the back of eleven. They had got him at the till of a public-house in the Garscube Road. I knew the face at once. . . ."

He hesitated. Caristiona sat numb, her white, withered face on the fire. The sergeant spoke again.

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## *FROM THE LONE SHIELING*

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"He was put up to it. Yon's not the kind of boy that makes a burglar. The regular man on the beat, he says it's a Fan-Tan job. That randy Bella Macfadyen's in it, I'll wager. But it's a bad job, Caristiona."

Still she had nothing to say. The policeman moved his feet.

"Not a word could I get out of him but the address. I thought I'd best come up and tell you myself, Caristiona . . . for old times' sake."

She raised weary eyes.

"Can you do nothing for him, Duncan?" she asked patiently.

"Nothing," he said. "It's a bad job."

Her eyes went back to the fire; and then, slowly and with a painful calm, she began to speak. She told her old friend the story of her life since they had drifted apart twenty years before, when the world was young and happy. It was a slow, sad story. At the end of it she rose wearily.

"And it was only to get him away from the city, Duncan," she said. "To get him out of this place that took the life from his mother, and away back to the Islands where there's a chance for a

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE* .

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body to keep clean. It's a cruel thing the city, Duncan."

The policeman, his head hanging, looked at her under his heavy eyebrows.

"I doubt, Caristiona," said he—"I doubt the city has been too much for the lad."

## CHAPTER VIII

### A CAGED BIRD

#### i

THE Reverend Mr Ian Ross Keith, B.D., minister of the Kelvin Parish Church, prided himself on a capacity for taking broad views.

“We shepherds of to-day,” he once observed at a Presbytery meeting, “have, and must have, a wide field of vision. It would ill become us as the directors of a great city’s faith did we not hold ourselves to an earnest concentration on the wider issues and what I may be allowed to call a tolerant good-humour in the matter of detail.” It sounded like a worthy sentiment, and was warmly applauded by a number of clergymen who had wearied of battling against the shortcomings of their flocks; and a verbatim report of that speech in the columns of *The Glasgow Herald* strengthened Mr Keith’s position as the most influential and mellifluous and broad-minded minister in the city. His daughter, Lorna, however, read the report with a more critical interest.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Good God!" was her terse, muttered comment.

Her father had just left the room, and she had picked up the paper precisely with the intention of distracting her mind from the obsession of his unfairness that had weighed on her for the last five years, ever since she had come back from school to look after the manse. Her mother had died then and was put to rest at last in the Western Necropolis. Shortly the boys, Ronald and Jack, escaped from the home, to which they were bound only by their mother's pitiful softness, and departed for India and Canada respectively. Lorna was left alone to get what she could out of a life of subservience to her father. And after five years of it she had wearied.

Again and again she had sought to escape from his muffling influence, but there was no piercing the thick padding of his mellifluous self-satisfaction.

"My chick mus'n't be leaving her poor old father to the cold comforts of an empty house," was a favourite remark of his.

What he meant was that Lorna had better continue to regard him as the only male figure of importance in her life. As if she ever had a

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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chance of more than casual intercourse with men! Her father put the situation in words of characteristic grace.

"I have done my best for you, Lorna. St Serf's was an expensive institution, and you were not denied extra classes in dancing and music. I don't think I ask too much—I won't say 'in return'—I say I don't think I ask too much when I put it to you that your duty for the nonce lies here at home and in the Mission Hall."

This was when Lorna had proposed to qualify as an instructor in domestic science. But he had her trapped. She saw it with clear-eyed fatalism. He even supervised the ordering and measuring of her clothes; and he paid cash in the firm expectation of discount. His guests at the manse were never more exciting than the session clerk, a widower of sixty-seven, whose favourite pleasantry was a wink at the minister's daughter, and earnest young Christian workers from the Mission, who went too abjectly in terror of their host's magnificence to speak of anything more intimate than the spread of the Gospel in the slums.

And there had been five years of it! Nothing she could do availed her in the least against her



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father's magnificent neglect of her individuality. A bland juggernaut, he went on his dignified way, crushing the young life out of her. That evening she had felt unwell. She had overtaxed her strength in the spring cleaning of the manse—seven days of heavy labour, each one of them followed by a wearisome night behind the counter in the Cowcaddens Mission Hall of her father's church. At the evening meal she had complained of a headache, proposing to stay indoors for once in a while.

“ My dear Lorna ! ” he had protested, his eyebrows lifting. “ Your duty—I should have hoped that you would know where it lies. Forsake the Mission for a trifle of personal discomfort ! I could never let you do yourself that injustice.”

So it was to be the Mission again that night. And to-morrow—cooking his food and washing and mending his linen. And to-morrow evening—again behind the counter of the Mission Hall, serving out countless cups of tea, sickening with the stale steam of it. And so on endlessly. The bleak futility of it ! Lorna dropped the paper, sank into a chair, and wept. She was young and wanted life.

It was more the resilience of her young spirit

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*A CAGED BIRD*

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than fear of her father that moved her, at the end of half-an-hour, to pick herself up and get ready to go out. The Mission was always something. Her father had extended his tolerance to the patronage of boxing-matches among the young men of the district, and this was one of their nights. There were some nice young men among them. Perhaps young Cumming would drop in, in his easy, careless way, to play gay tunes on the erratic piano. He always accepted her offer of a cup of tea and chatted pleasantly. . . . Thus Lorna's thoughts, making the best of it.

But upstairs in her room, while she put on her hat and coat, the sickness came over her again. She staggered in dizziness, clutching at the bed-post. And when the spasm passed, she dropped to her knees, burying her face in the soft blue quilt of her little bed. The tears came once more, and she knelt there for a time, sobbing in self-pity and genuine misery.

"Damn the Mission! Damn the Mission!" she said over and over again, biting her sodden handkerchief. And she thought with contemptuous hatred of her father, who would then be airing his social elegances in the drawing-room of Mrs Chamber-Burns, his richest parishioner.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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Lorna was at the extreme of misery when at last, an hour late, she reached her post in the Mission Hall. It was a busy night, for a boxing-match of unusual interest was in progress in the shed behind, and the earnest young workers had gathered in a bounteous harvest of fallen women and drunk men.

“There you are!”

The peevish greeting came from Miss Jessie Tosh, prototype in her father's eyes of the earnest Christian worker, a jaded but resolute woman of middle age, unofficially the head of the women workers.

“Just come now,” said Miss Tosh, pointing to the counter and the crowd clamouring before it. “We've been waiting for you.”

Her head aching, Lorna hung up her coat, tied on an apron, and took her place beside a battered urn: and in a moment she was overwhelmed with orders from the rough people of the slums. Their calls upon her services were brutal insults to her sensitiveness. She wanted to scream, to smash the thick cups and saucers on the zinc counter, and knock the urn over, to waste its grey brew on the knotted floor—anything to express the ferment of disgust and weariness.

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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ness and thwarted strength within her. Not a face in the crowd before the counter interested her. When she looked at one, invariably it seemed to be jeering at the infinitely hopeless piety of missions. She did not even look at the hands that were thrust forward to grasp the saucers, but slid the cups carelessly on to the wet zinc before her. An hour of it, and her headache was agonising. She could hardly see for the hot pain in her eyes, and she had to lean against the counter continually to save herself from falling. She was past knowing what she did, mere custom controlling her movements mechanically. Most of her conscious thought was on the difficulty of breathing in the foetid, warm atmosphere of the place.

At last, suddenly, her weariness brought her trouble. A wave of scalding fluid washed over the lip of a cup on to the hand of a woman with a horrible painted face. The woman screamed, then turned on Lorna a jet of filthy abuse. Lorna stood horrified, her poor excuses lost in the blizzard of indecency. Familiar objects seemed in her sickness to sway about her. Through chaos she heard the rough voice of a drunk man.

“ You throw tea at wee Lizzie ? Eh ? Throw tea, b’Gees ! ”

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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He lifted the cup and emptied it at Lorna. It missed her face, but the hot liquid stung the skin of her breast through a thin blouse. The shock brought back coherence. She managed to speak quietly.

"It was an accident. I'm sorry. Don't make a noise."

"Accident! No ruddy . . ."

He threw his drunken abuse at the shrinking girl. Her instinct was to fly, shrieking, from this culminating horror. She shut her eyes. Then the torrent of obscenity stopped suddenly. A tall young man, with broad shoulders and a mop of fair hair, had seized the ruffian. There was a scuffle, a clearing of the crowd before the counter, then a banging of outer doors. Order was quickly restored. Lorna went on serving tea till the crowd had thinned and finally vanished. She was washing up when she became aware of somebody behind her. It was the tall young man with fair hair. He was blushing pleasantly.

"Did he hurt you, miss?" he asked gruffly.

"No. But I was frightened."

"I know," he said sympathetically. "But I'm quite sure he won't frighten you again."

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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He grinned an explanation she was quick to grasp.

"Oh! You shouldn't. . . . Did he hurt you?"

The young man laughed.

"Hurt me! Oh Lord, no!" was the cheerful answer. "But perhaps you had better let me see you home to-night. That sort wants watching."

Lorna hesitated, blushing.

"It's very kind of you," she said, her heart pounding.

### ii

He was waiting for her in the bleak light of the incandescent lamp outside the hall. Without a word he took her umbrella from her and held it high, falling into step by her side. Neither had the social ease for these affairs; an awkward silence held them. Then Lorna made an effort.

"This is awfully good of you——"

The trite remark ended in a squeal. Two men had bounded from behind a corner into their path. They halted. Lorna found that her hand was on her companion's arm. She regained her composure to see that the ruffians were staring blankly at her escort. It was very odd. . . . Then

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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the voice of her new friend, wonderfully calm, spoke:

"That's the game, is it?" he said grimly. "You didn't think I'd be here, did you? Clear out, now, or I'll knock your ugly heads together."

The men mumbled incoherently, then turned and shambled away.

"Come on," Lorna heard him say.

"But what——?" she asked amazed, falling into step.

He laughed.

"Oh, it was you they were after. Pals of the man I put out of the hall to-night." He chuckled again: "What a surprise for them!"

"Why a surprise?" she persisted simply.

She wormed an explanation out of him. His name was Jock Crombie, and she seemed to know it. He explained that she had probably seen it on bills in the hall. He was a bit of a boxer, he said quietly. That wasn't his real business, of course—only an amateur, and he had a taste for training young lads in gymnastics and that sort of thing. Hence his presence in the hall. He was properly modest, but she got more out of him. As a boxer he was fairly well known, he thought diffidently. As a matter of fact, he was the Amateur

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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Welter-Weight Champion of Scotland. He had to explain the term; she was interested. Of course that wasn't his real business, only a hobby. He was really a draughtsman in a shipyard. . . .

So they came to the manse in Hillhead, having walked a mile through the rain, which neither had noticed. She paused, her foot on the bottom step of the flight leading up to the door.

"Well, good-night! And many thanks," she said a little wistfully.

"That's all right," he answered cheerfully. Then as wistful as she, "Good-night . . ."

"Good-night," said she again.

"Good-night. Perhaps we'll meet . . . I'm there every night, you know."

"Oh, surely! Good-night. . . ."

Next evening, for the first time in her life, she went with gladness to work at the Mission. And again, blushing to the roots of his fair hair, he approached her and diffidently suggested that perhaps it would be better if he saw her home.

So it happened, night after night, till there was no diffidence and no formality about it, only their happy custom. She was a radiant Lorna again, living vividly, established once more in the lovely vigour of her youth and feminine power. He was



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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so strong, so handsome, so gentle withal, her Jock. A good, clean boy. . . . One night she saw him, stripped of all but shorts and singlet for a bout, and was curiously, fearfully, splendidly thrilled by the strength of him. She found herself in agony till she heard that the bout was over, her Jock victorious. She wanted him.

At home, the Reverend Mr Ian Ross Keith was all unconsciously pushing her deeper into this high infatuation. He did observe the change in her, and spoke humbug.

"It gladdens me, Lorna, to see that you have realised the pleasures of duty. There is a life work in the Mission, my dear girl, and I pray God you may find all your happiness in it. And by the bye, Lorna, I shall be late to-night. See that a hot supper is ready for me—about eleven o'clock, say."

Lorna muttered in to herself, "Old pig! Old pig!" But she went gladly to the Mission.

It was an evening of unusual quiet in the hall, and during a wearisome lull between the hours of eight and nine Lorna stood reading an evening paper of the day before, on which the clean cups and saucers were laid in preparation for a rush of trade. So lost was she in her reading, a tall girl, with her red hair cloaked beneath a shawl of dark

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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tartan, had to rap on the zinc counter before Lorna looked up with a blank face. She started. It was Bella Macfadyen, the Queen of the Fan-Tans, who stood there, watching her with steady eyes and a cold, analytical smile.

"You the Moll that's efter Jock Crombie?" Bella came to the point at once, her voice hard.

Lorna flushed and drew back involuntarily before the force of this rugged personality. She hardly knew what she blurted in reply.

"That's my business," she meant to say.

"See here!" Bella went on harshly. "Cut it oot! It'll dae ye no good. See?"

"Will you mind your own business?" said Lorna, recapturing her dignity.

"Come aff it, or ye'll be sorry," she was told. "Cut it oot. See?"

It was all in the tone. The Queen of the Fan-Tans meant what she said, and there was a threat behind her warning. Content with so few words, she turned away quickly and walked from the hall, leaving Lorna to wrestle with conflicting thoughts and emotions the rest of the evening through.

Tearful, confused, her dignity sorely wounded, she blurted it out to her Jock as they walked westwards along Great Western Road. There was a

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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petulant question behind all she said, for she cared too much to affect the coquetry of disdain. He was silent for a long time, his eyes on the ground, then he spoke gravely.

"There's nothing marvellous in it," he said. "You see, Lorna, Bella Macfadyen and all her gang probably do a lot of betting; and, you see, I've got to defend my Championship title next Thursday fortnight."

"Well?" she asked shortly.

"Well, you see their money is probably on me."

"I don't see." Her nerves tricked her into harshness.

"Well, it's not"—he hesitated—"it's not easy to explain. But, you see . . ." Then he plunged, his tone resolute. "These people happen to think that our—our going together a bit will keep me off my training. And all that . . ."

Silence. By tacit consent, for they were near home and had yet much to say to each other, they turned to the left off Great Western Road and across Woodlands Road into the dark, wooded walks of Kelvingrove. The man slackened his pace at a seat near the black, quick stream of the Kelvin. They sat down.

"Don't you see?" he asked patiently.

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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She lifted a wan little face to look across at the University tower.

"Yes," she said limply. "I see."

That self-conscious silence fell on them again, but Lorna knew that it was she who, having made the situation, must break it. She struggled to keep her dignity.

"It seems absurd that our—our friendship has to depend on the pleasure of Bella Macfadyen."

"It doesn't," he said dryly.

"But she threatens me!" cried Lorna. "Have I got to stand that again and again?"

"No," he answered, speaking low.

"Well?" came the bleak, girlish question again.

He dared not speak. What right had he to . . . ? His own humble simplicity stood between them. He had no right. . . . He frowned at the scores the point of his walking-stick was making on the path. He heard her speak his name.

"Jock. . . ." It sounded ever so chummy.

He turned to see her frank, fair face smiling at him. He smiled back to her. They seemed to understand each other. Her white fingers went out to fiddle girlishly with a button on his overcoat.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Jock," she said again, ever so simply, "you won't let all that—spoil things?"

The dear child! He trembled.

"Jock, you won't, will you?" A little, pathetic wisp of a voice.

His strong arms went out to crush her sweet frailty to him. She let a tiny animal sound escape her and thrust her mouth to his. The quarters boomed from the University tower.

Then when they could speak again, out before his generosity she spilled her story—her need to get away from her father, his manse, and his Mission; her need for him; her need to have him away from that life in which Welter-Weight Championships and betting and threats shackled him and her.

"Yes, yes, darling," he comforted her. "Anything you like."

And in a moment they were discussing ways and means. The absoluteness of her feminine demands swept him off his feet. They could never get a consent from her father: the big fight was only a fortnight ahead—too intrusive an affair for their passion to tolerate. They would go away, just go away, elope. Jock knew that he could get a job in Belfast any day. But—he hesitated now—

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he had not much money, twenty pounds at the most. She swept that aside.

"We're going away to get married—at once . . ." she cried.

"Right!" said Jock heartily.

"I'll get money," she said gallantly. "And we'll go away. Somewhere. It doesn't matter. But we're going."

Her emotion ran away with her. She drew down his head with feverishly strong arms.

"With you—you—you! Soon . . ."

"Right!" said Jock again, and kissed her.

"And I'm going to tell Bella Macfadyen to mind her own business," she added femininely.

### iii

Lorna's first concern was to choose with the very greatest care a day on which she might escape for ever from her troubles with the least risk of accidental interference by her father. She looked in the little red book that lay on his study table and found that on the evening of the 10th November he was due to speak on "Civics and Faith" before the members of the Christian Students' Union, whose annual conference would then be in progress in the St Andrews Halls.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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It left her only a week in which to prepare, but it was too long for her. She had emptied her mind of everything save the desire to get away from her father, his manse, and his Mission, into freedom. She kept herself and her lover to the pitch of their first rapturous enthusiasm, and night after night elaborated with him their plans. Hers was the driving force behind the magnificent scheme; the suppressed instincts of years were in charge of her destinies now. On the 8th November, at their parting, she spoke her last precise instructions.

“Don’t come to the Mission to-morrow, dear. Don’t now. Promise! We’ll meet at a quarter to eight on Friday night at the station.”

“Right!” said Jock agreeably.

She glanced at him quickly. His tone was too light for her taut nerves. But she said nothing. She could not admit to herself the lightest wraith of a doubt. She clung to him long and fiercely when the time came for them to part.

“Stay at home to-morrow, Jock,” was her last plea.

“Sure!” said Jock, and let her go.

Herself, she went to the Mission as usual next evening. It was an important part of her

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## A CAGED BIRD

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anxious scheme that the absence of Jock would tend to confuse the suspicions of those who had watched their affair so closely. Nobody would ever guess that a girl about to elope could pass the night before in the orderly service of cups of grey tea. She could have laughed out loud as she worked. Her last glance round the hall, when at ten she passed through the door, was triumphant. Her heart was in her throat with gladness as she hurried westward. .

Suddenly, gasping, she was stopped in the New City Road by the tall figure of the Queen of the Fan-Tans standing in her path.

"Here, you!" And she gripped Lorna's forearm. "Did I no' tell ye to leave Jock Crombie alane?"

Lorna's raw nerves jangled into frenzy. She tore her arm free.

"*Will* you mind your own business?" she panted.

The cold face of Bella Macfadyen swayed nearer hers.

"Ye'll be sorry for it, ye wee fool!"

The imperative tone was maddening. Sense, caution and dignity deserted Lorna Keith. The tears came, and she sobbed.



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MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"Leave me alone! Leave me alone! It's *my* life. . . . Mine! And Jock's mine! Leave me alone!"

The sneer in Bella's face extorted the last, mad declaration.

"We'll do what we like. Do you hear? We're going away to-morrow night, if you want to know, and *you* won't keep us."

"Juist listen to that, now," said Bella, as one who commends a clever child to the attention of an adult audience. Having heard all she wanted to hear, she could afford to keep calm before this febrile petulance.

Lorna hurried away to catch a white car in Sauchiehall Street. At supper she had to bear her father's ornate egotism as best she could. And in bed in her little room she could not sleep. Bella Macfadyen. . . . Now she could laugh at that vulgar threat. They would be away to-morrow night before anybody knew. To-morrow night! If only it would come quick, quick! But it was a long white night.

Providentially, her father had to leave early the next morning for the meeting of the Christian Students' Union. He warned her before he went.

"I shall be late, Lorna. You may be back

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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from the Mission before I return. Have supper ready."

"You wait . . ." said Lorna inside herself.

Her mind could not achieve an adequate picture of the Reverend Mr Ian Ross Keith's return. Indeed, it was more concerned with the possible hiding-place of money in this dark study. Inside the roll-top desk, she felt strongly. . . .

"That will do, my chick"; her father dismissed her.

It was his bedroom she tried first when he had gone. Systematically she went through his clothes. Then, remembering her own feminine methods, she looked under his handkerchiefs, among his linen, and in his collar-box. But there was nothing to be found except, in the ticket-pocket of an old overcoat, a tarnished threepenny bit. She knew then that she must rifle the roll-top desk.

She guessed that it would be locked. And opening it would be a noisy process, for the only tool she could think of was the hatchet in the coal-cellar. Chrissie, maid-of-all-work at the manse, would have to be sent out to the baker's in the afternoon.

In the interval she packed with a calm that surprised herself. It was in her mind somewhere

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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that, the irrevocable step taken, the Reverend Ian Ross Keith would relent, so that she could return for her brown costume and the little felt hat in *tête de negre*. But lunch was not easily swallowed. And she felt the blood in her face when she sent Chrissie on a fool's errand for cakes for the minister's tea. Her conscience received preposterous comfort from the reflection that he would certainly need them on his late return.

The hatchet in her hand, she entered the study. She had to hack through the woodwork round the lock till the slats of the roll-top were splintered and raw. Her hands trembled as she turned out the drawers and pigeon-holes; she wanted very much to get away from the crying horror of that shattered woodwork. The silliness of the necessity of this felony was physically sickening. . . . But there was money inside—twelve Bank of Scotland notes in an envelope. She crushed them unnecessarily into a ball, and thrust the ball inside her blouse, and fled from the splintered furniture. It required a deliberate screwing-up of her courage to go back and lock the door of the study against possible enterprises on the part of Chrissie.

But she locked herself in her room. It suddenly occurred to her, with a force of terrifying intensity,

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that the stream of oratory at the session of the Christian Students' Union might dry up early, leaving her father free to return before she should be due to go. Lorna made up her mind to throw herself out of the window in that event.

She spent the afternoon weeping. The necessary appearance for tea was an ordeal, every foot-step on the pavement outside a torture. But it passed. The black night of the city came down with a November drizzle, through which the lamps gleamed pallid. Then an agony between each quarter's chime from the University tower. . . .

She ran down the stairs and through the murky hall half-an-hour too early.

### iv

It was a dismal road for a girl to follow in the dark of a wet winter evening. In that part of Hillhead the dull respectable houses lie back from the street behind a screen of sombre bushes, and afford only grudging hints of light and warmth within. The gas-lamps are widely spaced and pallid, making ghastly shadows with the branches of lifeless trees and the corners of irregular walls.

But Lorna instinctively chose the most tortuous

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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and least frequented route eastward. Her heart had jumped to her mouth on the first exit from the house at the sight of a motionless figure beneath a lamp on the other side of the road—the mysterious figure of a woman, her face obscured by a dark shawl. Instinct would have turned her back—and she could never go back. She fought to control herself. There was a lot of distress in town then; they were turning beggars from the door every half-hour. A woman could do no harm. . . . Lorna hurried on.

The road into which she turned first, if empty, was wide. There were no trees, only a fenced strip of grass running down the centre of the street. She crossed to the walk by this desolate garden and found her feet hammering on concrete. Involuntarily she looked over her shoulder. Again her heart went pounding; the woman was following. Or was it just the trick of the shadow beneath that low-swinging branch? It was horrible; confusing as well. Her ears could catch nothing above the throb of her heart. Imagination! But she quickened her pace, making now decisively for the risky but comfortable traffic of Great Western Road. She could get a car and take the seat outside in front, and hide

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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herself till the proper time in one of the waiting-rooms at the station.

The strip of garden ran to an end, and she saw that she must turn round it to the left and down the hill. In her apprehension it seemed such a long curve, as if she would never get round to whatever reality lay on the other side. She edged away from the iron fence towards the kerb. Then she stopped, congealed with terror. Something was thrown over her head—a garment by its smell—and her legs were kicked from beneath her.

The voices of women came to her as if from far away—three distinct voices. She was beaten. Everything was finished. So terrible was her grief, she would have counted the prospect of death at these rough hands quite welcome. There was no need to hurt her wrists and head so much, pressing them against the pavement. She wept.

Three voices—the voices of women.

“Whit’s in the case?”

“Here’s her handbag. Wait . . . Twelve quid!”

“Good enough! Tak’ everything.”

Beasts.

“Let me up,” pleaded Lorna faintly.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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They slipped the shawl from her eyes, but left it round her mouth as a gag. She was propped up rudely against the railing. She looked up from her poor white face at three tall women. One bent down to hiss at her:

"Juist you open yer mooth an' ye'll get yer heid split."

Lorna shook her head wearily. She felt that she would never open her mouth again. Something at the back of her mind was concerning itself with the depth of the Kelvin. If one dropped quietly over the bridge in the West End Park. . . . Peace, at any rate.

One of the women interrupted sharply:

"Whit's that?"

They stood listening. Down the concrete pavement came the clatter of feet, running. Snatching at her case and bag, the women fled with astonishing silence down the street towards Great Western Road. Lorna found herself looking up plaintively into the anxious face of Bella Macfadyen, Queen of the Fan-Tans.

"Are ye hurt?"

"No," faltered Lorna, then passed into a fit of painful sobbing.

She was lifted to her feet.

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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"C'm on hame."

"Nol Nol Nol"

Lorna caught at the railing with her hands and hid her face, her shoulders jerking in the paroxysms of her agony.

"Ye canna' stay here," said Bella Macfadyen firmly.

"I will. Leave me! Leave me! Oh, for God's sake, leave me alone!"

"Havers!" commented Bella dryly. "Ye're gaun' hame."

She put a firm arm round Lorna and heaved her away from the railings. The slighter woman struggled in vain. This grim rescuer was carrying her along. She could not resist. She pleaded.

"A minute. . . . Give me a minute. I can't go home."

"Why can ye no' go hame?"

Lorna clung to her. How good it was to pour out the beastly story to anybody, even to the virago of the slums. The suppressed emotion of years came gushing from her weary little heart. At last! everything, everything. She had to tell everything to somebody in this last bid for sympathetic understanding—how she hated her father; how she longed for life, for love, for



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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anything that was not home, not the Mission!—the whole story. . . .

The Queen of the Fan-Tans listened grimly. Her stern face betrayed nothing of what she felt, neither sympathy nor contempt. But she listened patiently; and that was all that Lorna needed—somebody to hear of her own tragic loneliness. At length she paused to hear whatever comment the Queen of the Fan-Tans might choose to make. It came abruptly.

“Whit about Jock Crombie?”

And Lorna had nothing to say. For the first time, and that with complete candour, she had to admit to herself that Jock had meant less, much less, to her in the escapade than the freedom she hoped to gain for herself.

“Ye needna fash yersel’,” the voice of Bella came to relieve her; “Jock’s been pit oot o’ the road. I told ye, ye wee fool, no’ to try ony games wi’ me. But c’m on—ye’re gaun’ hame noo.”

Lorna’s tears flowed afresh.

“I can’t. Oh, I can’t,” she sobbed. “I stole the money from my father, and now it’s been stolen from me. I wish I could die!”

“Havers!” said Bella rudely.

Her wrists held in a peculiarly effective and

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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painful grip, Lorna was hustled back to the door of the manse.

"In ye go!" commanded Bella. "I'll watch here and see ye don't skidge oot again. Go on, noo!"

Lorna looked up wanly at the face of the house. The gas in her father's study was lighted. Only an angry contempt for him and his work could fortify her for the horrible, inevitable interview. Oh, the beastliness! A stern voice in her ear stretched the rack.

"If ye don't go in noo, I'll drag ye in by the hair o' the heid."

And Lorna went slowly, trailing wearily up the steps.

### v

There must have been something in the story of Lorna Keith that touched the heart of Bella Macfadyen, something that appealed to her strong feeling for the rights of the individual, to her hatred of tyranny and humbug. For, having satisfied herself that Lorna was safe once more in her father's house, Bella Macfadyen found herself hurrying back to Mince Collop Close. In an apartment there she interrupted

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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three women engaged in sorting out the contents of a suit-case and a handbag. They looked up with smiles when she came upon them.

"That wis a nate job we made of it, Bella," said one in a tone of robust self-satisfaction.

"No' bad," Bella admitted. "Whit did ye get?"

"Twelve quid in the handbag and a lot o' claes in the case."

"Ye can keep the claes. See's the twelve quid."

The three women stared at their Queen. One voiced the common grievance truculently.

"It wis to be fair share among the fower o' us."

"I ken that fine. But it's gaun' to be naethin' o' the kind. See?"

"Whit's wrang noo?" they grumbled.

"Naethin's wrang. But I'm gaun' to gi'e that lassie back her money. See? Ye'll can get twa quid aff the claes an' dae whit ye like wi't, but the twelve quid's gaun' back. See?"

The three women exchanged lowering glances. But the whole law of the Fan-Tans was involved. The money was passed over to the Queen. She counted it carefully.

"Right!" she said. "The three o' youse'll get ma share o' the next do."

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## *A CAGED BIRD*

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Late in the afternoon of the next day Bella Macfadyen made her way westwards to the manse of the Reverend Mr Ian Ross Keith. It was dark when she hurried up the steps and rang the door-bell vigorously. Chrissie, the maid, her eyes red with weeping, appeared to question her.

"Tell Miss Keith I want to see her," said Bella.

"Miss Keith . . ." Chrissie's tears broke out again. "She's no' in."

"D'ye ken whaur she's gone?"

"She's . . . she's . . ." Chrissie was snivelling. "Ye'd best see the minister himself."

Bella accepted the invitation at once. Something was wrong. Curiosity alone would have carried her into the study—and she had developed an interest in the fate of Lorna Keith.

The Reverend Mr Keith did not rise to receive her, but he pointed to a chair. But Bella preferred to stand, on the defensive, near the door. One hand beneath her shawl grasped the twelve crisp notes.

"It wis yer daughter I wanted to see," she said coolly.

"My daughter!" The minister started. Then he passed a hand dramatically over his forehead. "My daughter has gone."

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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“Gone!”

“Gone. I made her go. She was unworthy of my trust. She stole—I conceal nothing. I am not ashamed of my burden—she stole. I put her from my door. It is as well that the people of the Mission should know that I will not tolerate in my own what I would not tolerate in them.”

Bella's fingers tightened round the notes. But she had another question to ask.

“Whaur's she gone to?”

“That I cannot tell. Nor do I intend to find out. I allowed her what would keep her for a month. The rest is with herself. May she come to repentance, and realise the outrage on a father!”

“Ach!” ejaculated Bella involuntarily.

“May I ask what you wanted of that misguided girl?” the minister said, as Bella turned to go.

“Oh, ye can ask!” Her tone was scornful. “I juist wanted to gi'e her a hand to get oot o' the hole ye had her in. But ye've done it yersel'—and I'll juist be gettin' back hame.”

Home she went and sought out her three partners of the night before.

“Here's three quid to each o' youse,” she said casually.

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*A CAGED BIRD*

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"Did she gi'e ye it back?" queried one, incredulous.

"No; I juist chairged her that for gettin' her oot o' a hole," replied Bella, and turned away, whistling a cheerful air.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE JEWELLED CROSS

#### i

**I**N Italy, so travellers tell, there lie among the hills behind Naples sequestered hamlets, of which the natives are capable of conversing fluently in English, if with the accent of Clydeside. Some say that they prefer, even among themselves, to use the alien tongue; and this, indeed, is not to be wondered at, for the acquisitiveness of the Italian people drives them far from home in search of wealth and sustains them long in foreign parts, so that—the ambition realised, the stocking full, and comfortable retirement possible—they return as strangers to the land of their birth. Years of work on an American railroad, or decades of ice-cream selling in the slums of Glasgow, brand a man indelibly.

Thirty odd years ago, in such a hamlet, there was born to Catarina, wife of Gennaro Conti, a son. Gennaro had seen the world and life. To make Catarina his own he had laboured and saved in a shop of his own in a Lanarkshire mining

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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village, selling ices and hot peas, according to season, to Scots of coarse physique and rough ways. It had been hard, but it had been profitable enterprise. Gennaro was barely forty by the time his savings-bank account showed a balance that promised a cosy old age in Italy. When the baby came, he knew that he had done well. In the flush of parenthood he dreamed of great things for the boy, whom they had christened, with joyous ceremony, Giuseppe, after the father of Catarina.

It was only natural that the early rigours of Gennaro's life should, when he came to plan its continuance in the individuality of the young Giuseppe, reflect a reaction from the sordidness of trade among rough people who lived under grey skies. So Gennaro dreamed, and was abetted by Catarina, a creature of piety and an idealist for all her peasant practicality in the conduct of everyday affairs. Before his fifth birthday, when it was clear that he showed an aptitude for letters, these excellent parents had it settled that Giuseppe, the blossom of their love, should be a priest. In that understanding the boy grew up.

Here was matter for fond parents' dreaming—the priest, beloved of his people, soothing and



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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guiding them. . . . That was enough for the good Catarina. But Gennaro, the man, went on to see the red hat over the black curls of their darling; saw, even, the white fingers of his own flesh and blood raised in pontifical benediction. . . . Happy years, until the day of rejoicing, when the boy came back from the seminary at Rome, tonsured and ordered duly.

They had not seen much of him in all that time. The Ghurch had taken him young, for green twigs are most easily shaped, and had grudged even occasional exposures to the influence of home. These last three years had been the most barren for Gennaro and Catarina, and their comfort was all in the hope, in the imminent realisation of the ideal. It was something very like a stranger they welcomed. But what a joy to see that here was a man, no mere mealy-mouthed ecclesiastic! Devout and grave in the observances, of course ; but this Giuseppe was tall and handsome; there was a laugh in his eyes, and his lips were full. Decidedly a man; and no priest was the worse of having within him a little of the old Adam, so that he might the better understand his people.

The parents rejoiced and opened their house

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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to friends, and Giuseppe was not backward in the merrymaking. He could charm laughter from the girls: no village gallant was cheerier company when Giselda and Teresa and Giulia must be seen home under the stars. It might not be seemly for a priest to dance, but this was open, simple fun, decorously conducted in his father's house under his mother's mild eyes. A girl's blush might tell of an amorous word gone home, but it was gallantry on conditions known to all. Jealous neighbours said hard, cynical words round the well in the evenings; they did not know the regularity and fervour with which Giuseppe said his office in the attic under his father's roof. A man, and a holy man, clean and healthy and strong, the parents saw in him. A cardinal must be a man of knowledge and affairs. It was the happiest month in the lives of Gennaro and Catarina—and, may be, in that of their Giuseppe—that which passed before the Church took him to prepare, in the monastery at Velletri, for contact with the world at large.

A maid wept at his going, Anina, daughter of Antonio, the cobbler, and Catarina comforted her with cheerful words, urging the lass to look about her for a husband. Whereat Anina wept

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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the more. Three months later she drowned herself in the river that flows behind her father's house, but not before she had, brokenly and in despair, told Catarina how disastrously she and Giuseppe, the priest, had loved.

They wept together a night through, Gennaro and his wife; then, swearing the schoolmaster to secrecy, had a letter written to the lad in Velletri. Two days after, Gennaro set out by train to see for himself, anguished as he was, what might be salved from the wreckage of a life. It was the Father Superior who received him with grave kindness.

"He is gone," said the holy man at once. "No one knows where. He was difficult in many things, and now . . . this. It must have been early in the morning of yesterday." The old man with the grey face looked down at the bowed, bald head of poor Gennaro, and went on quietly: "That is not all. We had on our altar a jewelled cross of great antiquity—a beautiful relic, and priceless. It, also, is gone. . . . There is but one conclusion. The police have been informed."

So Gennaro went home with a broken heart to a bitter old age.

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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### ii

At the door of his shop in Water Street, Cowcaddens, Glasgow, there stood on an autumn evening one Luigi Guiscardi, watching the drizzle come down between his eyes and the pale light of a street-lamp, dreaming regretfully of the sunny street of an Italian village he had quitted fifteen years before. Luigi was one of those who had not prospered according to the standard of his kind. This shop in Water Street was his fourth venture in search of wealth, and already it was shaping ill. Trade depression was on Glasgow; takings were meagre, and his wholesalers were clamouring for their bills, and, so far from having at the bank the nucleus of a fund that would re-establish him with credit among his own people, he was quickly running through the last few pounds got from the sale of his third little business in Greenock. The hopelessness of his case was completed by the fact that he had married a Scotswoman, who had told him plainly, indeed pungently, that she would never leave her native land for any blooming Italy—and he could put that in his pipe and smoke it.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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These hard words had been repeated by Signora Guiscardi no more than an hour past. He had just sped the angry departure of old Granata, who supplied him with wafers and had refused to supply more until his bill for August was settled. So Luigi was despondent. He hated this life of his; he hated the wet, muddy streets, the grey ugly buildings, and the dull skies above this city that denied him even a livelihood. He hated his wife and his shop, and could not bear to go indoors. Everything for him was hateful. He could only stand thus at the door, transfixed by misfortune, and weep softly for the dreams that had been his.

Water Street was strangely empty. A message-boy in oilskins sauntered away down the other side, whistling in the loud, lugubrious manner of message-boys. There were lights in the tenement windows, proclaiming life and warmth within. But before Luigi's eyes there was nothing friendly; in his bewildered mind revolved no hopeful thought. The present was dark, the future hopeless.

So dreary was the prospect, it was with the effect of shock he heard the brisk footsteps of a man approach from the North. Turning that

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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way, he saw a young man who looked about him with curiosity. Habit drew Luigi inside his shop to the receipt of possible custom. He listened hopefully. Nearer and nearer came the footsteps. They halted outside; then the rickety door let in a draught of the night wind and a young man, who stood for a moment to shake the wet from his hat of black velour.

“Luigi Guiscardi?” said the stranger, a compatriot plainly. Luigi nodded, and the young man went on: “I am Giuseppe Conti, son of Gennaro Conti, whom you may remember.”

Luigi remembered; and the surge of recollection came over him like a breath of the south wind. They embraced each other, these two exiles. Gennaro Conti had once assisted Luigi to a fresh start after his first failure in Greenock. Affectionately the shopkeeper drew the young man into the chamber behind the counter, helped him to remove his sodden overcoat, and opened a flask of Chianti.

They talked. It was all reminiscence. Luigi was hungry for news from home, from the villages in the hills behind Naples, and that Giuseppe could supply, either from memory or out of a fecund imagination. They warmed to it, too.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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The wine was heartening: and they were exiles, reaching out to each other through misfortune. Luigi wept to tell his story and recall his thwarted hopes. He unburdened himself, finding splendid relief in these confessions of failure—Greenock, and the rain and the roughness of it—this miserable booth in Water Street. He went on, too, to tell of his mistaken marriage, of the wife who would not go to Italy, of his despair of ever seeing that fine land again. And he kept the Chianti going. They were at the fourth glass before Luigi left his own sorrows to ask after the hopes and intentions of his visitor.

No, Giuseppe had not come to Glasgow to start in the ice-cream business as his father had done. He indicated largely that his education had fitted him for something finer. He was travelling about a bit, seeing the world. He had heard much of Glasgow, could speak the language, having lisped in it from his earliest days. He might be going on to America soon. In the meantime he had a room out West, near the Park.

It was not convincing. Luigi had a rational mind, and the poor clothes and pinched face of the boy pointed to anything but affluence. In strict sobriety, Luigi might have hesitated to

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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accept the tale, but he was flushed with wine and the warm sympathies of blood. He did not criticise. He went back to the theme of his own regrets.

Now and again throughout the evening Luigi had to leave his guest to attend the counter, but he hurried back on each occasion to the conviviality of the back room, where there were all the riches of association and blood-brothership to comfort him. He put up the shutters soon after eight o'clock and gave himself over entirely to the new friendship. There was still plenty in the flask. They drank again, and talked, talked. At length the world was again a cheerful place. This friendship of theirs revealed itself as the most wonderful experience of their lives. They drank to Italy, to each other, and embraced with each toast.

This heartiness gave place, in the normal cycle of intoxication, to the solemn and secret confidences of boon companions. They sketched a colourful future. It was elaborate, magnificent, secure. For poor Luigi it was altogether too good. His habitual moroseness of temperament came over him at last like a chilling blast of the Scots rain. He sighed heavily.



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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“ Ah, my friend, if it were only not a dream! ”

But Giuseppe was flushed with wine and its easy optimism. He laughed.

“ You laugh! ” said Luigi bitterly.

At which Giuseppe screwed up his face to what was nearly a leer. His right hand fumbled inside his jacket and brought forth a flat packet, which he laid between them on the table.

“ See there,” he crowed, triumphant. “ Open it, Luigi. Open . . . ”

Wondering, Luigi pulled at the string and tore away the paper round a cardboard box. Again he looked at his companion, who nodded brightly. Luigi removed the lid. The name of the Virgin trembled on his lips.

In the box lay a jewelled cross. It was small—six inches by four, perhaps—but it sparkled there, a thing of flawless beauty and supernal art, shrieking its pricelessness to the bewildered brain of Luigi Guiscardi. Struck dumb, he fingered the rubies like a blind man, feeling their richness. At last he raised his eyes to interrogate those of his surprising friend. Giuseppe leaned back in his chair, tasting his triumph.

“ It is mine—ours—yours and mine. It came

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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to me—justly. You help me to sell it; there is our future! ”

That flash of hope dazzled Luigi. Instinctive fear of this tremendous wealth left him. Weeping once more, he embraced Giuseppe and called him friend, benefactor, saviour. They filled their glasses once again.

Giuseppe slept that night in the room behind Luigi's shop, but Luigi sat on in his chair, wakeful and sober, pondering this strange business. He had qualms; then he looked round his poor shop and saw that necessity must drive him to any length. In the chill hours of early morning his embittered mind turned to scorn the flashy stranger who offered him a share of plunder; he was aware of contempt, but the stranger placed an opportunity before hungry eyes, and it must be taken. His shrewish wife, his creditors, the coarse Scottish people, Italy—Luigi thought of all these and stiffened in determination. He felt at last that he could murder the young man rather than let this dangerous hope of release escape him. When the grey light of the dawn was struggling into the tawdry shop he wakened his guest rudely. Giuseppe rubbed his eyes and passed a dirty hand over his hot, aching forehead.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"The cross . . ." said Luigi hoarsely.

Giuseppe groaned and turned his eyes away from the light. Luigi shook him again.

"The cross, man, the cross. You must get rid of it!" he insisted.

Giuseppe sat up, his eyes suddenly full of apprehension.

"You know . . . ?" he asked blankly.

"I know nothing," said Luigi curtly. "I know only that it must be sold, and quickly, too. Listen, you, Giuseppe Conti—I can help you to sell it. Through a man, a friend. He comes here often, every day. They are lawless people hereabouts, and this man knows the way in such affairs. He will take us to somebody who can help you. See?"

"I must sell it—quickly," said Giuseppe grimly.

"Just so. And listen, Giuseppe; for my share you give me half. You understand? I take a risk, for how do I know where the cross came from? You hear? One half . . ."

"I would take a hundred lire to be rid of the thing," said Giuseppe bitterly.

They breakfasted on hot Bovril and biscuits, and there was silence through the meal. It was

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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interrupted once, when Luigi's daughter, Lucia, hammered on the shutters of the shop and called her father out to hear an indignant message from his wife. Luigi ignored its urgency.

"All right, all right," he said impatiently. "And see here, Lucia. You know Mince Collop Close? Go there, then, and ask that Danny Gregg come round here at once. It is important, you understand. Now run. . . ."

The child turned away obediently, and Luigi returned to his companion.

"My friend is coming round now," he said.

Danny Gregg arrived within half-an-hour. He was a slim young man, and in his eyes and on his lips there flickered perpetually an ironical smile. The strength of the hooligan is usually in his muscles, but that of Danny Gregg was in his brain. His quizzing eyes were full of wariness as he approached the shop-door, at which Luigi waited restlessly.

"Whit's yer trouble noo?" he asked; but Luigi merely beckoned him in to where Giuseppe was nursing his headache and his apprehensions.

Luigi had no time to waste in diplomatic approaches. On fire with fierce covetousness, he assumed the interest of Danny Gregg, familiar

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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with the nature and disposal of stolen property. And Giuseppe, weary of guilt, produced the cross with alacrity. When the wrappings were undone and the costly beauty of the thing lay revealed, Danny's habitual cynicism deserted him for a moment.

"God love us!" he muttered.

He felt Luigi's bright, hungry eyes on his face and pulled himself together.

"It's a job for old Sarah Rafferty," he said, affecting the casual.

They set out at once, the three of them, leaving young Lucia to deal with such customers as might patronise the shop. This ancient queen of reseters dwelt in a single room opening directly off a gallery that overlooked the courtyard of Mince Collop Close. On the thin, cracked door Danny Gregg knocked in a peculiar rhythm and whistled low and with meaning. Squint-eyed, obese and wholly villainous, Sarah Rafferty opened and let them in.

There was no exchange of badinage. Mrs Rafferty was a woman of business. But she called upon the name of her Saviour at Danny's deliberately dramatic exposure of the cross. Then, affecting professional aloofness, she took

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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it up and weighed it in one of her fat dirty hands.

"It's a bonny bit thing, richt enough," she said judicially, "but it'll no' be easy got rid of."

Danny smiled his whimsical smile.

"How many hundred quid, Sarah?" he asked point blank.

"Hundred quid, yer auntie!" replied Mrs Rafferty, quick in defence. "This'll tak' time."

Thus they fenced for a space, enjoying the game, while Luigi fidgeted at the window and Giuseppe looked about him with apprehensive eyes, wondering into what strange corners his malignant fortunes had led him. The final arrangement fell out as Danny Gregg had known it would. From the hands of Sarah Rafferty he received twenty-five pounds in advance; the balance, less Sarah's considerable commission, to be paid over as the jewels of the cross should be subtly disposed of, one by one.

"And it'll no' be easy," said Mrs Rafferty, guarding herself.

"And nane o' yer tricks, Sarah," said Danny.

They trusted each other implicitly.

One pound was Danny's reward for his part in the transaction. Back in the shop, Luigi handed

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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to Giuseppe a sheaf of twelve dirty notes. With these Giuseppe hurried away—to the docks, and out of this chronicle—having so easily ridded himself of the burden of the cross and its inseparable dolours.

### iii

It was not at all like Danny Gregg to pass out of an affair involving so much wealth with one miserable pound to mark his association with it. Nor did he, by any means, intend to let it go at that when he accepted the dole from a grateful Luigi. His cynical mind enjoyed that incident for its implicit irony. Then he went off, smiling, to seek out Bella Macfadyen, Queen of those Fan-Tans, of whose organisation he was a valued member.

There were reasons, other than strictly mercenary, why his story should be of interest to that monarch. A vendetta, on the one hand, and a man's devotion to a woman, on the other, were involved. Once upon a time Mrs Sarah Rafferty had clipped on Bella Macfadyen to the police, and that score had never been satisfactorily wiped out. And Danny Gregg dared to love the Queen.

Bella listened to his story with that rational

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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calm she reserved for the serious moments of her piratical life. She lifted her eyebrows a little, nothing more. If Danny hoped to win a sign of favour, disappointment was his. Her tremendous egotism could consider nothing but the cross itself and the most direct method of obtaining it for herself—from Sarah Rafferty, in revenge.

She did not ask Danny to accompany her on even the first careful reconnaissance of the position. Alone she faced her enemy and victim that evening, when the darkness allowed her to slip unseen along the balcony above the puddled courtyard. Mrs Rafferty made no effort to conceal her suspicion and her hate of this dictator of the slums, and Bella came to the point directly.

“Let’s see the cross,” she commanded.

“Whit cross?” sparred Mrs Rafferty, backing to the fireplace.

“Come aff it! Ye ken fine whit cross.”

Sarah Rafferty lifted a poker and, as if reflectively, stirred the embers of the fire.

“It was that Danny Gregg told ye, I suppose?” she remarked at length.

“Oot wi’t,” said Bella grimly.

It was impossible to disobey. Mrs Rafferty had some animal courage, but more animal



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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cunning. She knew that a whistle from her enemy would bring against her a host of fierce young men and women, angry and unafraid of the law. Without a word she stepped to the bed—one of the few real beds in Mince Collop Close, and a poor specimen at that—and drew from beneath the tumbled, dirty rags of blankets a small, flat, parcel. This she undid in silence. Even in the yellow light of a smoky oil-lamp with a bashed reflector the cross glowed and sparkled with rich loveliness. Bella's bright eyes coveted it.

"Mebbe ye'd like it to wear at the Hallowe'en Dance?" said Mrs Rafferty at length, ironically.

"Mebbe I wid," was the dark reply.

The Queen of the Fan-Tans turned and went out. Mrs Rafferty listened till her crisp footsteps died away along the balcony; then she turned to the fireplace, levered up the hearthstone with the poker, and laid the cross in the recess thus exposed. She took a private oath never to quit her dirty dwelling until her agents, already informed, had taken the precious thing away in whole or in parts.

Bella Macfadyen sought out Danny Gregg at once, and found him alone in the archway leading to the Close.

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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“I’ve seen yon,” she said.

Danny smiled his whimsical smile.

“I’m wantin’ it,” Bella went on. “See here, Danny . . .”

Already a plan had formed in her sharp mind, and she gave her commands as if to a chief of staff. His mother’s house was on the side of the courtyard opposite Sarah Rafferty’s; Danny was to watch from the window every movement at the latter’s door. If men came up and were admitted—he was warned to be specially watchful of Jews—they were to be stopped before passing back into the public streets and their pockets rifled. Very simple, very forceful; such were always the Queen’s commands. A party of Fan-Tans would always be there under the archway to accost Mrs Rafferty’s callers.

“Right!” said Danny agreeably. But Bella was not finished.

“I’ll gi’e ye three days,” she said. “If the cross has no’ been passed oot by then, we’ll juist have to go and tak’ it. I’m wantin’ it for the Hallowe’en Dance on Friday night.”

And this was Tuesday. Danny smiled again. It comforted and delighted him to mark the femininity over which even the Queen could not

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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triumph. The Hallowe'en Dance was to see a contest of the sexes. In the handsome person of one Rose Ann Runcie, a rival to Bella Macfadyen in the favour of the Cowcaddens hooligans had arisen, and for weeks the Fan-Tans had been anticipating with delight the inevitable clash of their Queen and her competitor at the dance in the Painters' Hall. There would certainly be words; probably blows; possibly bloodshed—a zestful prospect. And now it was revealed to Danny that, with the aid of the jewelled cross, Bella Macfadyen was determined to hold her place as Queen in virtue of looks as well as character.

“Right!” he said again and smiled.

His was a cheerless vigil for the next forty-eight hours. Sarah Rafferty had no other visitor than Luigi Guiscardi in all that time. Luigi's visits were frequent, it is true. Danny stopped him once and got an impassioned tale of money troubles, domestic differences, debts and general misery, shot through with the glow of the poor fool's hectic cupidity. Luigi had fostered suspicions of Mrs Rafferty. He spoke, scowling horribly, of the manner in which he would use his knife should she deceive him. Life could mean nothing for him if he were to lose this

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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chance. And he would not go out of it alone. . . . So, with elaborate pantomime, he gave Danny Gregg to understand.

But Danny had no other visitor to study. A ragged wee lass fetched the necessaries of life for Mrs Rafferty from the store down the street, and a woman searcher, who handled the messenger with vigour and freedom, reported that she carried nothing away from the hovel of her employer. The days passed uneventful. Friday dawned, and still no sign of a likely customer. When the dismal dusk of that last night of October was falling on the slums, Danny Gregg was called from his post by his Queen.

"I'm juist goin' to tak' yon," she announced abruptly.

Within half-an-hour it was taken. They entered Sarah Rafferty's house in force, overpowered, gagged and bound her, and threw the furniture about the room in their search for the hiding-place of the cross. It was Danny Gregg's astute mind that suggested at last the raising of the hearth-stone. Holding the cross wrapped in her tartan shawl, Bella Macfadyen addressed the victim.

"I'm wantin' this the nicht," she said. "Ye'll get it back—mebbe."

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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With that, she gathered her henchmen and left Mrs Rafferty to the mercy of chance. Outside, she drew Danny Gregg apart.

"I had to have it for the dance the night," she confided fiercely.

Smiling quietly, Danny returned to his mother's house. There was nothing else to do until the time should come for him to join the Fan-Tans and escort his Queen to the Hallowe'en Dance, at which the pretensions of Rose Ann Runcie were to be destroyed by the splendour of the cross decorating Bella Macfadyen's barbaric beauty. But Danny was not without misgivings as to the sequel of the raid on Sarah Rafferty's house. The police were fairly frequent visitors to that known clearing-house of stolen property. Danny thought it necessary still to keep an eye on the dull green door across the courtyard.

And in the gloaming, silent at his post, he saw a figure steal along the balcony, knock at that battered door, wait for a moment, then knock again, then again wait—then push boldly in. Luigi, the Italian. . . . Silent, but swiftly, Danny slipped from the table on which he had sat to watch and passed out of his mother's house. Gliding through the shadows, he hurried down-

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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stairs till he came to the archway. There, whistling softly in feigned unconcern, he waited. Seven minutes later a man distraught, Luigi Guiscardi, hurried past.

"Ye're in a hurry the nicht, Luigi," said Danny lightly.

The Italian stopped and peered at him through the gloom. His eyes were wild, and the muscles of his jaw were drawn tight.

"You!" He came close to Danny. "You can tell me. That Bella Macfadyen—where is she?"

"Whit d'ye want wi' Bella?" asked Danny cheerfully.

"The cross!" Luigi was mad with anger. "She took it—stole it. The cross, my cross! All I had. I want my cross—my cross!"

"Ye'll never get it from Bella," said Danny.

"I will not ask it," hissed the foreign voice. "By God, I will knife her before I ask! I will take it back—my cross. I know. She will wear it to-night, at the Dance. . . ." He drew back his lips, and his fine teeth shone white. "By God, she will not wear it long!"

He made to move off, but Danny held him back.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Nane o' your knifin', Luigi," he said grimly.  
"They'll string ye up."

"What matters? What matters now?" The wild eyes rolled. "I am done! My wife left me to-day, and took all the moneys I had to pay my debts. And Granata, and Coia, and Macari—they screw me for my debts and are bringing the law to seize my little shop. And my children are crying for food. And the cross would have saved me—brought me money to pay them all and go back to Italy, out of your horrible country. . . ."

His tears came. He held to Danny's arm and quivered with passion.

"I go!" he cried. "I don't care now if I die. But, by God, that woman will die first! . . . I do not know her, but I will see her with the cross to-night. Then . . . so!"

He made a vicious gesture and ran away down the street. Danny Gregg was left staring before him, trying hard to realise that the Queen, the woman he silently but so fiercely adored, was in danger of the madman's knife.

Tall, erect, high-coloured and aloof, Bella Macfadyen never looked so truly regal as when,

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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that evening, she strode through the swing doors of the Painters' Hall and, surrounded by her people, waited for her rival to appear. Men looked at her and thrilled dangerously to the suggestion of her wild beauty; plainer women paid her the tacit tribute of fear and hate. Could it be that Rose Ann Runcie had even been thought the equal of this splendid creature?

It was, somehow, the quality of cruelty in her air that fascinated. This evening, as Danny Gregg knew well, there was a reason why Bella Macfadyen's beauty should blaze with unwonted fire, why she should hold herself so proud and scornful.

The cross had been stolen from her. She had returned after dark from a hurried run round the shops in Dobbie's Loan to find her house ransacked, the furniture and bedding all awry, the cross gone. There had been words about that, and Danny Gregg had been the butt of her lashing tongue. And it was too late then to do anything. Without the cross she would have to face her rival. But Rose Ann Runcie must be faced, even if the competition had to develop into a battle of razors and knuckledusters. In her bitterness the Queen had prepared her followers for that.

So there was tenseness in the atmosphere



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### *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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inside the Painters' Hall. The Fan-Tans stood solid round their Queen against one wall and watched the door through which the figure of Rose Ann Runcie must soon appear. Neutrals gathered in small, whispering groups, and divided their quick glances between the door and the silent group against the wall. There was trouble brewing. Everybody knew as much. Rose Ann Runcie could never have hoped to find an audience so tautly keyed up for her appearance.

They waited. Women laughed too loudly now and then, suffering under the strain. Even the Fan-Tan men shuffled their feet impatiently. Only Bella Macfadyen, the Queen, remained impassive, beautiful and cold. They waited.

Rose Ann Runcie came at last. Tall and imperious and coloured, like her royal rival, she posed in the doorway and stared haughtily across to where Bella Macfadyen answered the challenge. And on the breast of Rose Ann Runcie there blazed the jewelled cross.

Danny Gregg, holding himself ready beside his Queen, saw that she started. He heard her mutter an oath. But a swift movement in the body of the hall took his eyes back to Rose Ann Runcie. Out of the crowd there darted a lithe man, a piece

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## THE JEWELLED CROSS

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of shining steel in his hand. It whipped above Rose Ann Runcie, then flashed into her bosom below the cross. She swayed and fell forward, a crumpled flower. There was a fiendish yell as her men fell on Luigi Guiscardi.

Danny did not hesitate now. He seized Bella's wrist and dragged her towards a side-door.

"Oot o' this. . . .Quick! The polis'll be here. Quick!"

They ran, and did not stop until, panting, they faced each other in the shadow of a warehouse by the canal.

"Danny!" Bella gasped. "Whit wis it? Whit——?"

He cut short her flow of staccato questions.

"It was naethin'," he said curtly. "I told ye ye were mad to tak' the cross."

"But how did Runcie get it?"

"I saw she got it."

"You saw? . . ."

"Aye! I saw. . . ." He faced her squarely. "It was me that took it from your place. It wis me that pit it where she couldna' miss it. Say whit ye like, Bella Macfadyen, but if I hadna' done it, it's you that would ha' stopped the knife."

But Bella Macfadyen had nothing to say in her

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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authority as Queen. For the first time in her life she was encountering a brain quicker than her own, a fortitude she could not but admire; and both had been employed for her sake. She listened quietly while he told the story. Her voice shook when she gave him her thanks.

“ Oh, Danny . . . ”

There was that in her tone which told him that, if the cross had not helped Rose Ann Runcie to a throne, it had brought with its dolours, and for him alone, the abdication of a real queen.

## CHAPTER X

### IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

#### i

**B**URKE LAFFERTY, brother of that Red Lafferty who was led by his jealousy to the murder of Constable Macaulay, and thence to the scaffold, was discharged from Peterhead after serving a seven years' sentence and came back to Mince Collop Close. Within an hour of his return, on a September evening, the news of his arrival was known throughout a wide district. The sentimentalists of the slums hastened to shake him by the hand and smirk round one so distinguished in crime; and it was something like a formal reception Burke Lafferty held for his admirers in his sister's house. Drink was brought in to celebrate the occasion: the gossip of years was retailed; shrill women and rough men competed for the attentions of the ex-convict. One of the first things they told him was how his brother, Red, had died. Continually he heard the name of Bella Macfadyen mentioned as that of his successor in the leadership of the Fan-Tans.

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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"Is that auld Cassidy's wean?" he stopped them once to ask darkly.

They explained Bella to him, and he held his peace while they talked. Only the lowering of his heavy eyebrows betrayed his interest in the topic, which shortly gave way before their curiosity as to the manner of life in Peterhead. But later, in the evening, when his crude vanity was still further swollen by flattery and drink, Burke Lafferty leaned forward to his old friend, Joe Macphail, and whispered through a chorus that rose drunkenly in the foetid air of the crowded room.

"Here, Joe!" he muttered confidentially, "this'll ruddy well have to stop."

"Whit'll have to stop?" his friend asked.

"This Bella Macfadyen an' the Fan-Tans. See? D'ye think I'm gaun' for to work wi' a Moll! Nae ruddy fears! See?"

The chorus had ceased before Lafferty had finished his sentence, and a flushed girl by his side caught the drift of his whispered threat. She cried out:

"Are ye no' gaun' for to work wi' Bella then, Burke?"

Every eye in the room turned upon the heavy

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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face of the ex-convict, and a score of excited voices took up the sensational cry. These, his friends, were thrilled by the spectacular surprise of the idea, and Lafferty's truculent egotism had to gratify them. He affected a heavy contempt of Bella Macfadyen.

"Me work wi' a wumman! Nae ruddy fears! She's gaun' to get the shift, quick!"

And round Mince Collop Close the word flew rapidly. It was a challenge which the convention of these people made serious, definite, like a declaration of war. It held for them the promise of such a naked struggle for power as their crude souls delighted in, and they debated it all through that night. They had a new, sensational interest, and they prepared to enjoy it. Factions began to form almost at once. The larger gathered round the figure of Burke Lafferty. He had the prestige of the convict, the attractiveness of a novelty, and the vicarious distinction of one who challenged the authority of a powerful personage; and some of them, fickle as their fortunes, suddenly discovered that the harsh, unsentimental discipline of Bella Macfadyen was intolerable.

- It was her most faithful adherent, Danny Gregg, who took word of the schism to his Queen, going

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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out to meet her on her return from a visit to friends in the Calton. She heard his story with neither concern nor surprise.

"I thocht it wid be like that," was all she said. "But we'll see."

"But, Bella! Ye canna! . . ." he pleaded.

"Juist you wait, Danny," she returned, with a pressure of friendly fingers on his arm. "Have I ever been bate yet?"

Then she started humming, and said no more about the matter until they turned in under the archway of Mince Collop Close. There they stopped dead to face Burke Lafferty, leaning against the chipped plaster on the walls, the centre of a number of his admirers. Silence came over the group with the effect of a positive explosion. The rivals studied each other, face to face in that confined space. There was a sneer on Lafferty's face, but his heavy wits could not provide him with words to meet the situation. It was Bella Macfadyen who, hitching the shawl about her proud shoulders, at last advanced a step and spoke, magnificently cool.

"You Burke Lafferty?" she asked.

"Aye," growled the man. "You Bella Macfadyen?"

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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“ Aye. How d’ye like the look o’ me ? ”

Her insolence struck him dumb. His companions moved their feet and muttered, but none spoke up. She swept them all with an indifferent glance, then turned to Burke Lafferty again.

“ You comin’ in wi’ the Fan-Tans ? ” she asked abruptly.

“ We’ll see aboot that,” Lafferty contrived to fence.

“ Weel, ye can stick if ye don’t want to,” she said. “ But if ye do, I’m wantin’ you an’ fower ither men for somethin’ the morn’s nicht aboot ten. See ? ”

She did not wait for a reply, but passed on into the ciose, followed by Danny Gregg. The courage of Burke Lafferty revived with her going. He made to his companions a jovial pretence of having used a subtle craftiness in the encounter.

“ Ye see, boys,” he explained elaborately, “ I wasna’ gaun’ to let on, for if I had let on, she’d juist have din a bolt the morn, ye see ? But I’m gaun’ to dae her doon right. See ? We’ll juist go wi’ her the morn’s nicht an’ gi’e her a clatter on the heid that’ll finish her, ye see ? There’ll be ‘nae mair Queen o’ the Fan-Tans then, b’Gees ! ”

Burke Lafferty’s subtlety and sentiments were



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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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warmly applauded by his friends. They chuckled over the surprise the Queen was to receive and saw themselves the favourites of another dynasty. With much solemn reiteration they swore themselves to secrecy.

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Bella Macfadyen made no attempt to sleep that night. Instead, she sat on a chair before the fire, her fiery hair hanging like a golden shawl about her, and stared into the heart of the coals, turning over in her accurate mind the elements of her position. She had been shocked by that reception in the archway—not by the obvious truculent enmity of Burke Lafferty but, ever so profoundly, by the aloofness of those about him, once her faithful henchmen. She despised them, but she needed them to support her power; and now—she had felt it at once—they were turning from her. She had jested before Danny Gregg, but it had been with an effort, as if from out the shadow of an impending calamity . . .

She smiled wryly to herself, sitting there. So it was all threatening to go—the fun, the adventure, the power of her precarious position as leader of that gang. What caused her to smile was the

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## *IDYLL OF THE QUEEN*

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sudden realisation of a change in herself; how, a year ago, she would have blazed with passion at the suggestion and darted into quick, dangerous action against Burke Lafferty. And here she was in the chair by the fire, thinking of the triumphs of the past rather wistfully and of the future without excitement! Novelty was gone from these wild affairs of her youth. She had changed.

"Soft, b'Gees!" she murmured to herself. She thought of that temperately and of the reasons; and her mind filled with the image of Danny Gregg, cool, smiling, intelligent, the man who had turned the stiletto of Luigi Guiscard from her breast. She felt her heart beat and the thrill of a tremor through her body. Was it Danny, then? She puzzled over the discovery. . . . So through the hours she sat by the fire, gazing into its red heart raptly, with her beautiful lips parted and a soft look in her eyes such as no man had ever seen, till the grey of the autumn dawn stole into the room and roused her with its chill touch.

Danny Gregg watched from his mother's window that morning for her appearance. He had to wait till after eleven, when, dressed in her best and fresh from her morning toilet, she stepped out on to the gallery and made her way down to

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### *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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the courtyard. There were few people about. Mince Collop Close had stayed up late to celebrate the homecoming of Burke Lafferty, and only a group of noisy children and a strange young man in a dusty bowler hat were visible. The young man was busy taking measurements with a surveyor's tape, and the children were following his every action with excited interest. Danny put him down vaguely as a Corporation official. Then he saw that Bella paused to speak to him. Their conversation was more than casual: he saw the young man point with a professional, explanatory finger. . . . They parted only when Danny clattered down the wooden stairs to greet his Queen. She hailed him gaily, and her brightness only mystified him.

"Are ye gaun' oot?" he asked gravely.

"Aye," she replied. "An' I'm no' wantin' ony company either."

Danny was irritated by her gay chaff.

"Aye, but whit about Burke Lafferty?"

"Are ye fear't o' him, Danny?" she asked blithely. "You keep yer hair on. Did ye ever see me bate yet? Meet me at nine the nicht an' le' me alane the day, Danny; I've a lot to dae."

With a bright smile and a flick of her shawl

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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she left him. He had to wait, fretting, till seven in the evening before he saw her return and enter her house. Darkness had fallen on the city and nine o'clock had rung from the steeples when, leaning against the railing of the gallery, he heard her door open and saw her, tall and straight, coming towards him. They paused there to speak, for down in the courtyard and under the archway the people of Mince Collop Close were gathering, and to their ears rose the hoarse, truculent tones of Burke Lafferty and blares of laughter from the mouths of his sycophants. Bella leaned over the railings and peered down at the groups below.

"We're for it the nicht, Danny," she said softly.

"Aye, we're for it. Burke's got them . . ."

She glanced at him sharply, but her voice came, coquettish.

"Wid ye no' risk it, if you wis me?"

"Nae fears," said Danny firmly; "I'd wait a bit."

He did not face her, but kept his eyes sombrely on the men and women beneath them. He dared not look at her. Then he felt her hand touch his arm and heard her voice, playful.

"Wid ye like to see me gi'e it up like that, Danny?"

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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"It's no' that," he insisted doggedly, avoiding her look. "Ye can wait fine. An' yet ye'd go oot wi' fower o' them the nicht. They'll dae ye in."

"But you're comin' wi' me, Danny," she said.

"Am I? An' whaur are we gaun'?"

"You wait. Come on."

She stood up straight.

"Bella!"

He put out an imploring hand, but she only smiled at him.

"Come on," she said again, and he had to follow her.

A hush fell on Mince Collop Close when they were seen descending the stairs. Round the burly figure of Burke Lafferty at the mouth of the archway the largest group of all was gathered, and they shuffled closer to each other in dead silence as Bella Macfadyen made her steady way towards her rival. It seemed as if the encounter must be final. The laughter ceased, and the sporadic clusters of men and girls turned to watch the meeting of the Queen and him who would be King. Danny Gregg, at Bella's shoulder, felt the uneasy tension in the air and knew that the popular feeling was unfriendly to Bella Macfadyen, whose rule had yesterday seemed to be so secure. He

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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braced himself for the struggle he felt to be impending, and his quick eyes glanced from face to face. Most of the eyes he challenged turned away from him. . . . But the Queen went before him steadily, her head high, to challenge Burke Lafferty.

He leaned, frowning, against the wall as she approached, his hands in his pockets, a stump of cigarette in the corner of his mouth, and he waited sullenly for her to speak.

"Are ye ready?" she asked.

"Ready for whit?" he countered heavily.

From behind came the rustle of the excited voices of the people, agog for the climax. Some laughed loudly, as if Burke Lafferty had achieved a stroke of wit. But Bella kept her eyes steady on the heavy face.

"Never mind whit," she said. "I'll tell ye when we start. I'm the boss here."

"Are ye, b'Gees!" snarled Lafferty.

Again the laughter, as at a happy sally; and mingled with it, rebellious growls of disapproval of Bella's imperious presumption. Danny Gregg felt for the razor in his pocket. Bella was standing silent, her chin tilted back with regal coldness, her well-shod foot tapping the cobbles.

"I'm waitin' on ye," she said at length.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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Burke Lafferty spat the stump of cigarette from his mouth and looked round the circle of his friends with a leering grin.

“ She’ll wait a hell of a long time, eh ? ” he said.

And a shout of laughter rang through Mince Collop Close, approving the wit of Burke Lafferty, satirising the pretensions of Bella Macfadyen. She swung round upon them. Her eyes were blazing, her fingers clenched tight. But she did not speak. The curl of her lip in the greenish light of the lamp told them what their Queen was thinking. And as their jeering rose in a miserable chorus, the set of her face taunted their fickleness, till they paused again, silent before the indomitable strength and fierce beauty of her. It was then, in that pause, she chose to turn to Danny Gregg and rap out a sarcastic comment.

“ We’ll be better withoot that lot, Danny. Come on ! ”

And she swept out through the archway, followed by the growl of their truculent rage.

Danny Gregg, trotting by her side as she swung westward along the New City Road, was mystified and anxious.

“ Bella,” he asked — “ Bella, whit are ye gaun’ to dae ? ”

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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"God knows," she replied sharply, her eyes straight before her. "Whit does it matter?"

There was nothing for him to do but follow where it pleased her to go. She was still his Queen. He kept step with her doggedly along Great Western Road, down a quiet residential avenue to Woodlands Road, and thence into the Park. It seemed as if she had a destination, a purpose, for she did not pause to choose among the scores of paths that ramble through that wooded space, but bore straight uphill to the summit, from which the bold statue of a soldier on horseback looks over the valley of the Kelvin to the vast silhouette of the University and its monstrous tower.

There she paused, a hand on the railing, her eyes roaming over the expanse below. Here and there among the trees winked the yellow lights of the lamps. Sauchiehall Street, away to the left, was garish with peach-coloured arc-lamps on tall standards and busy with lighted tram-cars, cruising up and down like galleons afire. But there was peace near at hand. The University buildings were silently massive against the starry sky. From the seats in the walks below came the whispering of lovers or the tinkling laughter of happy girls.



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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The lightest of winds, blowing across the Renfrewshire hills and the river from the south-west, whispered and fretted among the trees and toyed with a golden curl against the warm cheek of Bella Macfadyen. Danny Gregg watched it wave and flicker there. It hurt him somehow to see in the baby curl that his termagant Queen was only a woman after all, one who felt pain terribly, a soft creature to be petted and comforted.

“Bella . . .” he began.

Her hand touched his gently; and though her eyes were still turned from him, he waited for what she was going to say. Her voice, when it came, was strangely gentle.

“They’re done wi’ me, Danny,” she said, and an empty, wistful little laugh was wrung from her. “They’ve got tired o’ me, an’ there’s nae Queen o’ the Fan-Tans noo.”

He had nothing to say to that. After a time she went on again:

“An’ d’ye know, Danny,” her voice rang more brightly, “I’ve tired o’ them. I’ve had ma fun, an’ it wis great while it lasted. But a lassie wants mair than that. . . .”

Again she paused, and now it was Danny’s turn to look away. He was drawn back to her by

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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her hand on his arm. Her eyes were smiling happily to him.

"Danny," she said, "I think me an' you'll go away thegither."

"Bella!" cried he, and held out his arms for her.

Smiling still, she pushed them aside gently.

"Wait, Danny. I'm no' finished yet wi' Mince Collop Close. I've a bone to pick wi' Burke Lafferty before I'm finished."

"Ye canna' risk it, Bella," he protested. "Burke'll . . ."

She stamped her foot impatiently, and a glint of the old temper flashed from her eyes.

"Will ye listen, and dae whit ye're tell't!" she flamed. "See here, Danny . . ."

She told him what he was to do. He was never to go back to Mince Collop Close. She would return, but only for a time—till she had squared accounts with Burke Lafferty. She did not tell him what was in her mind, only smiled at his anxious questions. In the meantime he was to arrange some means of leaving the country—as stowaways, if need be—and let her know when everything was ready. This was his Queen as she used to be, cold and accurate in command.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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He pleaded with her.

"Lemme go back wi' ye to the Close, Bella. Ye canna' go there alane."

"Did ye no' hear whit I wis tellin' ye?" she rapped out at him.

He hung his head, and she drew her shawl about her shoulders as if to go.

"C'm on then, Danny," she said quietly. "It'll no' be long noo . . ."

"Bella!"

She looked at him and saw the adoration in his eyes. The restrained warmth, the reserve of motherhood within her reached out to this boy, her man.

"Danny! Danny!" she cried with a strange, pathetic little catch in her voice.

Into his arms she sank and rested there gladly, while her proud mouth was crushed by his kisses. Wanderers of the night passed them closely by, from the distant streets came the hum of the city's traffic, and the whistle of shunting trains in the great goods yard at Kelvinbridge tore through the night air. But they saw nothing but each other's near, dear faces, heard nothing but the beat of each other's hearts, till at last she withdrew herself from his arms and with a word, strangely curt, hurried away by herself on her last, mysterious mission.

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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### iii

It was a strange return to Mince Collop Close for one who had once reigned there so vividly. The reception they gave her was not even coloured by danger. Some jeered at her; others openly ignored her; most of them accepted her presence in the Close as they did that of any other woman, neither with animosity nor interest, in complete indifferent neutrality. The only hint of passion came from Burke Lafferty himself. He caught her arm as they passed on the stairs one afternoon.

"I suppose ye think ye're a' right noo," he sneered. "But your time's comin'. I've got it in fur ye."

That was all. In the meantime he and his Fan-Tans were distracted elsewhere by interests and opportunities of another kind. A General Election had come upon the country suddenly, and the fight in Glasgow had been joined with promptitude. In the Division which embraced Mince Collop Close it was already raging fierce and hot. Strong local interests were involved. The Conservative candidate was none other than Sir John Hoare Raith, ex-Chairman of the Glasgow Rovers' Football Club and Chairman of Directors

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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of Scotia Food Products Limited, against the walls of whose large, gaunt factory Mince Collop Close was huddled meanly. And Labour was championed by Joe Baxter, once a sprinter of repute, now the fiery Secretary of the Rafter's Union. Here, in this contest, was fun; and the young men and women of Mince Collop Close were quick to make the best of it. There might be good fighting—there certainly was much shouting; and chances of work, profitable, yet not too energetic, were always to be had.

So Bella Macfadyen was suffered to come back to Mince Collop Close in peace. The first day of her return she spent in clearing up her house. There was little enough in it, but she went about her task with grave deliberation and care, so that the long day passed pleasantly enough. She was particularly careful to go through her stock of clothes, reject what was worn or elaborate, and pack the rest in a canvas bag. On the morning of the second day she saw from her window—and smiled mysteriously at the sight—that the young man in the bowler hat, accompanied now by a boy, had returned with his measuring-tape. Humming an idle tune, she watched him at his work for a time, till he desisted from his measuring and

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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stood up in the October sunshine, writing in a note-book. Then she sauntered out with a jug in her hand, as if to fetch water, and passed along the gallery and down the stairs.

The young man looked up as she went by, still humming that careless tune. A smile came over his pleasant face. .

She spoke casually;

"When are ye gaun' to tear it doon?" and nodded towards the warren of ancient houses.

"Not for a bit yet," said the young man affably. "But it looks to me as if it might come down of its own accord if anybody sneezes too loudly."

He laughed in a friendly way, and she stopped to tilt her head and look at the sketch he had made in his note-book. He explained it with the technician's interest in his job.

"See that gable there?" and he pointed with his pencil. "Look at the bulge on it where it's shoved up against the factory wall. Knock one of these timbers away, and down comes the whole bag of tricks." He laughed again and added: "Good job they've cleared the tenants out of those houses at that end."

He snapped the note-book shut and started

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### *MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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to wind up his tape in its leather case. 'Bella turned away.

"Tell us when it's comin'," she said casually over her shoulder.

The days passed. From Burke Lafferty came no hint of a threat. Danny Gregg, lost in the world outside, was silent. It seemed as if the crisis, having worked up with such swift violence, had spent itself and was fading out in the harsh, distracting light of the electioneering. The thought afflicted Bella, to whom such danger was the breath of life, for whom revenge on Burke Lafferty and the sheep-like horde that had deserted her for him was passionately necessary. It was tiresome to be so free to come and go, to gossip aimlessly with the older folks, to be so carelessly ignored, as middle-age might be ignored, by the gang she once had led. She itched to be up and doing. They must come, of course, the clash and her own triumph. She trusted Danny Gregg implicitly. Just as certainly she trusted the vengeful cruelty of Burke Lafferty, whom she had insulted before the people.

But it was so drab, this waiting. Her strength had not the great quality of patience. She went out one night among the Fan-Tans, as they

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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returned home in a body from the streets, and taunted their leader as cruelly as she knew how. Alone in the archway, leaning negligent against the chipped plaster, she greeted with a cool, sarcastic sentence his entry at the head of the gang.

"Hullo, Burke Lafferty," she said. "When's the fight comin' aff? I'm fed up waitin' for it."

"Fight, b'Gees!" growled the man, approaching her with his pugnacious crouch. Bella did not alter her casual pose.

"Aye, fight," she repeated. "Mebbe ye're waitin' till ye're drunk enough . . ."

He was glowering in her face. Behind him his people incited him to smash her face, kick her, kill her; and Burke Lafferty's passion was hot enough for that. A clenched fist swung back . . . But Bella did not move a muscle, only leaned there against the wall, smiling satirically. The fist dropped. Her passivity defeated him.

"I'll wait for ye, ye bitch!" he snarled.

Bella stood upright and hitched her shawl about her.

"I'm ready ony time," she said coolly.

She turned on her heel and walked away across the courtyard. Jeers and threats followed her,



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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but she kept steady on her way to the stairs. At the head of the flight she turned and, derisively flippant, put her thumb to her nose, spread out her fingers, and flicked them in jaunty mockery of the crowd below. They roared at her. . . . Then she waved her hand gaily and passed along to her room.

As she expected, the night passed quietly. It was not the Fan-Tan way to attack within the Close, upon which the police kept such a wary eye, where witnesses not at all friendly to the gang abounded. They would make for her some other way, and they would take some time to plan the assault. And Bella confidently expected to get due warning of their schemes. News passed quickly through Mince Collop Close, and she had more than one old friend left to her.

So she slept well, wakening at the back of eight o'clock, and cooked and ate her breakfast calmly. At eleven, she saw from her window that Burke Lafferty and four of his friends went out into the streets. From then till noon, one by one, in couples and groups, the young men and women of the Close disappeared through the archway to make the best of the election fun on this' eve of the poll. By the early afternoon the place was

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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drowsy in peace, strangely quiet under the sad October sun.

A furtive knock at her door brought Bella to her feet as she was drinking a cup of tea about four. She stood listening, till a frail voice piped outside:

"It's me, Bella."

Danny Gregg's old mother! Her heart pounded. Swiftly she let the old woman in and locked the door behind her.

"It's from Danny," said Mrs Gregg colourlessly. She was old and white and tired. "I saw him last nicht. I wis to tell ye he's ready noo. The ship's at Finnieston. Setterday she sails. Is that right, Bella?"

"Right," said Bella quietly.

"Ma boy's deavin' me . . ." wailed the old woman.

She wiped her eyes with the fringe of her shawl. It was as if she was bewildered by the incalculable fancies of youth, tearful and helpless in her old age. Bella patted the gnarled old hand.

"It's a' richt, mither. Danny'll be fine wi' me. Don't you fret. I'll bring him back to see ye soon."

There was no response from that wasted body

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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and shadowy brain. Mrs Gregg stared mysteriously at the fire. Then she wakened up out of the blankness of senility to speak again. •

“Burke Lafferty . . .” she said suddenly. “Yon’s a bad man, Bella. They were tellin’ me he’s gaun’ to catch ye. Efter the meetin’ the night he’s gaun’ to catch ye. He’s a bad man, yon. . . .”

She gazed at Bella vaguely with rheumy eyes of pale china-blue.

“Ye’ll watch oot, Bella, won’t ye?” she pleaded. “Danny wid be terrible angry if they hurted ye.”

“That’s a’ richt, mither,” said Bella ever so tenderly. “They’ll no’ hurt me.”

A lump was rising in her throat. She took the old woman’s arm and raised her from the chair.

“Ye’d best awa’ hame noo, mither,” she said softly. •

“Aye, aye, aye . . .” the old voice quavered.

She tottered on Bella’s arm to the door. Then she paused to search the younger woman’s face with eyes in which, for all their dimness, there still lived the spirit of indomitable maternity.

“Ye’ll be good to Danny, Bella, won’t ye? He’s a good boy, Danny,” she faltered.

Swiftly Bella stooped and kissed the in-turning lips of the frail old creature. When she shut the

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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door<sup>o</sup> behind her she had to brush something away from her eyes. . . .

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She spent the rest of that day indoors. It was still very quiet in Mince Collop Close. Only the older folks were left to gossip, with folded bare arms leaning on the railing and against the pillars of the gallery, while the thin voices of children at play rose from the courtyard in the hazy glow of the late autumn afternoon. The traffic of the streets, humming steadily, passed unheard, realised only in the tremors it sent through the decrepit building. Bella, settling herself down for a nap, heard with a sense of unreality the crooning of some fancier's pigeons on the roof.

It was eight o'clock and wholly dark before she roused herself to brew a cup of tea. She had heard the loud voices of young men and women in the courtyard about six before they scattered to their homes for a meal. At seven they gathered again and paraded out, chanting *The Red Flag* dolorously, to swell an enthusiastic audience at Joe Baxter's meeting in the Painters' Hall. Now she was tolerably certain that the Close would be deserted.

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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Nobody saw or heard her slip from her room. She flitted like a shadow along the gallery, down the wooden stairs, and back along the face of the building in the shadow of the overhanging plat, past the last of the inhabited houses to where the bulging gable rose above her in the darkness. Round that she felt her way with an arm upraised; in a moment her hand was on one of the untrimmed shores that supported the decaying wall. From under her shawl she took a small saw and set to work grimly.

It was a long job. The timber was shoulder-high and full of knots. She stopped at the sound of every footstep, stiffening with anxiety and fear. A train passed through the tunnel below, shaking the ground, and a fragment of the coping round the chimney came whizzing down past her and thudded on the ground. She paused, a lump in her throat. . . . Then on again till the saw was crunching through the last half-inch of dry wood.

She paused and walked backwards to study the black outline of the gable against the glare on the night sky. It was her plan to knot a length of rope round that faulty shore, move back to safety, and pull. But she hesitated now, fearful before the possibilities of the act. There was no danger

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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to life in it; the gable would fall soon of its own accord, and she required most desperately that it should fall now. But to destroy, to bring down a building with which her whole life was so warmly bound up, to hear it crash down thunderously, to risk detection.

Bella Macfadyen paused in trepidation before these dark reflections. And as she stood there, pondering almost dreamily, there came to her brain the first rumblings of an external sound. Her dreaming broke off sharply, and she listened. Her recognition of that sound was immediate. They were towing through the streets on a heavy bogey a ponderous boiler or some massive tons of machinery. Such loads passed frequently, causing the very doors of Mince Collop Close to rattle in sympathy and the pokers to jangle on the hearthstones.

She ran back and snatched up her saw. When she reached her door, the thunder of the bogey's approach was near at hand. In less than a minute it would pass. She stood tense by the table, her ears straining, her eyes fixed on the door—as if some nameless terror were about to enter. Louder and louder rolled the bogey over the cobbles.

When it came, the crash of the gable oddly

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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disappointed her. There was a muffled thud, and her lamp flared high, then was steady again. The pause that followed was more awful. Then at last came the rattle of opening doors, shouts, screams of women, the angry voice of a man, extremely blasphemous, and the thudding of his feet along the gallery. She went out and joined the gathering crowd.

The job had been thoroughly, perfectly done. The gable had fallen, most of it, outwards, and the shores were buried beneath a dusty pile of masonry. But the inhabited houses were untouched, the forlorn walls of the room at the end making a new gable, ludicrously decorated with peeling patches of stained paper. Had anybody been hurt? Rumour sped here and there among the crowd in the courtyard, but Bella looked about her from face to face, asked questions of those most likely to know the truth, and was satisfied at last that it lied, that no injury had come to the people. She smiled darkly to herself, moving among those bewildered, excited men and women and children, whose cries and argument and loud, sardonic laughter filled the courtyard.

Soon the crowd was swollen with curious people from the streets. The police came and stood

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## IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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massively between the fallen masonry and the curious. Corporation officials followed them and, looking extremely wise, pointed out to each other the defects of the structure. The ruined gable was roped off. Then the Fan-Tans swarmed in noisily, bringing with them the Labour candidate for the Division, Joe Baxter. The news had reached the hall and broken up the meeting, but Joe Baxter saw a great opportunity and rushed to snatch it. He was elevated to the balcony, and from there he delivered a bitter, impassioned attack on all owners of property. He had never a more receptive audience. They stood below in the courtyard and yelled their delight in his invective, their anger at the objects of his sardonic wrath.

Bella had withdrawn quietly to her room. She listened, smiling now and then, to the hoarse, ruthless voice of the orator and to the sombre, passionate responses of his audience. It gratified her vanity to think that once again she had checked the plans of Burke Lafferty. She chuckled to know that her own courage and her own wits were more powerful than the combined intelligence and the massed brute-strength of the Fan-Tans, that she was herself their Queen and conqueror



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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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in the sheer virtue of her personal distinction. . . . And then she wanted, in the ecstasy of her pride, to rub it in, and flaunt her distinction in their faces, and mock at them.

She waited for Joe Baxter to be done; but this was his opportunity and he used it to the full. It was near midnight when he stopped at last and descended to mingle with the people. She heard them hail him as their idol, heard their silly shouts of enthusiasm for his cause and their violent mouthings of vengeance on his enemies. Then she jumped to her feet at the sounds of a motor horn in the street outside and the purr of a great, expensive car coming to rest at the mouth of the archway.

Silence fell on the people in the Close. She could hear the rustle of their excited interest in the distraction, but in a moment the courtyard was filled again with the shouts and curses of men and the jeering shrieks of angry women. Bella guessed that Sir John Hoare Raith had come to answer his opponent. Opening her door an inch or two, she saw the commotion outside and the swirl as the candidate and his agent made towards the building. Fists were being shaken in his face, and the roar of the people's anger surged up and

beat about him. The police thrust their way to his rescue. Soon Sir John Hoare Raith was standing on the balcony, on the very spot from which Joe Baxter had just harangued the mob. It seemed as if they would refuse to hear him, but he stood there, solid and calm, until the shouting died and a rough voice from the courtyard called on him to begin.

"I shall not keep you five minutes," he began, heavily self-confident. "This is no time for empty expressions of sympathy. I only wish to say that, while others have been talking"—and here he smiled cunningly—"while others have been talking, I have been busy on your behalf."

There was an angry murmur from the courtyard, but he held up a fat, white hand and went on.

"I am informed by the Master of Works that this building is now decidedly unsafe, and that the tenants will have to leave it at once."

He paused for the announcement to sink in. They received it with the silence of shock. Blandly he continued:

"Hearing that, I determined that the people I hope to number among my constituents should not suffer if it lay in my power to prevent it. And all I want to say is this. I have arranged that every

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## MINCE COLLOP CLOSE

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man, woman and child in Mince Collop Close shall be provided with good accommodation—better, I think, than you have enjoyed here. The available houses, I am sorry to say, are scattered fairly widely over the district, so that old friends and neighbours may have to part for a time. But they are ready now, waiting for you at this very minute.”

He paused again. Somebody raised a cheer, but it was taken up only faintly. Mince Collop Close was still grappling in stupefaction with the impending threat of dissolution to its home. The baronet spoke again.

“I hope you will go quietly and at once. My agent here, Mr Wishaw, will see to the allocation of the new houses. I would advise those with young families especially to go now; you can come back and remove your furniture to-morrow. And to all I should like to say that I have arranged for a hot supper to be supplied to applicants from Mince Collop Close in one of the store-rooms of my factory next door.

“Believe me, ladies and gentlemen, I have done what I could. It was no more than my duty, and I hope you will be satisfied. That is all.”

He stepped down. And as a new tumult arose

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## *IDYLL OF THE QUEEN*

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from the courtyard, Bella Macfadyen closed the door of her room, leaned against the wall near the fireplace, and laughed till the tears overflowed her eyes. She laughed, because the cynical adroitness of Sir John Hoare Raith delighted her with its calm competence; and because of all who listened to him, only she knew that he had planned long ago to knock down Mince Collop Close to make room for the extension of his works, that the alternative accommodation had long been ready against the day of eviction, and that he had done no more than make political capital cheaply out of an accident. Out of her satisfaction in her own subtlety she could spare some admiration for that resourcefulness. She only wanted now to meet the young man in the bowler hat who had gossiped so pleasantly; then Burke Lafferty, whose gang was to be broken up and scattered by the demolition of the warren that housed it.

She awakened from her reverie to hear the people bustling about their houses, making ready for departure. They were happy again, with the resilience of the poor, laughing and jesting coarsely as they packed, actually excited now to be going elsewhere, genuinely content, many of them, to be leaving these miserable hovels. Bella picked

up her canvas bag, took one long look round her room, blew out her lamp, and stepped on to the balcony.

Burke Lafferty was mooning alone at the foot of the wooden stairs. She stopped before him, smiling.

"Hullo, Burke! When's the fight comin' aff?"

"You wait," he snarled at her.

"Ach, I'm tired waitin'," she answered. "Ye're a poor, silly nyaf o' a King for the Fan-Tans to have."

The blood came up into his heavy face, and his hands clenched as if to strike her.

"Juist you wait, b'Gees!" he flamed. "Wait till the flittin's past, an' by God you'll get it in the neck!"

"Ach, I havena' time," she said carelessly. "An' mebbe you an' me'll no' be livin' up the same close."

She turned and left him. Sullen, from under heavy eyebrows, he watched her walk jauntily across the courtyard and out into the street.

"Some Moll, b'Gees!" he muttered to himself reluctantly. . . .

And precisely the same remark passed over the lips of John Macneil, bos'n's mate on board

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## • IDYLL OF THE QUEEN

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the ~~ss.~~ *Calabra*, Glasgow for New York, when, five days later, he came up out of the blackness of the fore-peak and met his friend, Ginger Thomson, in the alleyway.

“Been doon wi’ their grub?” Ginger had asked in a whisper, looking over his shoulder to see that no one was about.

“Aye, an’ I tel’t them we’ve cleared Merville, an’ that it’s a’ right noo.”

They went on deck together and up on to the foc’s’le head.

“She’s a great girl, yon,” said Ginger reflectively. “Her an’ her dungaree suit an’ her hair inside a tweed bunnet. Ye got the five quid for her a’ right?”

“Aye, that’s right,” replied the bos’n’s mate. “The wee fella paid on the nail.” He paused and spat over the side. “What’s the game wi’ the two o’ them, I wonder.”

“Dunno,” answered Ginger lazily. He winked at his friend. “Five quid an’ nae questions, remember.”

“Ach, they’ll juist be runnin’ away to get married,” the bos’n’s mate speculated indifferently.

“Ah, weel! He’s a lucky young chap, that. She’s some Moll, b’Gees!”

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*MINCE COLLOP CLOSE*

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He filled and lit his pipe, and when he looked up again Ginger was asleep. A gull screamed and swooped about the mast above them. Looking aft, the bos'n's mate saw the great ship swing slowly as she lifted her bows to the Atlantic swell and pressed on with purposeful grace towards the promising shores of the New World.











